



魔法科高校の劣等生

師族会議編(下)

The irregular
at magic high school

佐島 勤

Tsutomu Sato

illustration / 石田可奈

Kana Ishida

魔法科高校の劣等生

師族会議編(下)

The irregular
at magic high school

佐島勤

Tsutomu Sato

illustration / 石田可奈

Kana Ishida

電撃文庫

佐島勤

Tsukasa Sato

Illustration 石田可奈

Kana Ishida

Illustrator assistant ニー ス ト ン、末永麻子
design B.B.P.B.B

魔法科高校の
劣等生の19

The irregular
at magic high school

師族会議編(下)

グ・ジー 顧傑の暗躍

顧傑、別名ジード・ヘイグは何年も前から、虎視眈々と日本を狙っていた。

彼を総帥とする反魔法主義国際結社『ブランシュ』は、その下部組織『エガリテ』を第一高校内でつくりあげ、反乱騒ぎを起こさせた。

一昨年の九校戦では、リチャード＝孫に支援して作らせた国際犯罪シンジケート『無頭竜（ノーヘッドドラゴン）』を使い、彼が発売した魔法師生体兵器ジェネレーターを会場に送り込んだ（さらに、『ソーサリー・ブースター』と呼ばれる魔法の威力を増幅する危険な魔法補助具も提供した）。

顧傑最後の弟子である周公瑾は、横浜事案を起こした大迫連合軍破壊工作部隊を手引きし、去年の九校戦では『パラサイトール』事件

を起こし、混乱をもたらした。

そして、今年の師族会議会場でのバベット・デコは、顧傑が得意とする死体を操る魔法によって起こされた。

全ては、四葉へ、日本魔法界への復讐のため。しかし、その動機は、すでに本人にも定かではない。古式と現代式による魔法の考え方の違いにより、彼と敵対していた崑崙方院を破壊に迫りやった四葉家は、むしろ「敵の敵」と言える存在だったはずなのだが……愛国心の故か、復讐の相手を言われたことに逆恨みしたのか……分かっていることは、かつて生前の周公瑾が評したように、顧傑の精神は「怨霊」に相応しい妄執に凝り固まっていることだけである。

顧傑の特性

顧傑が得意としているのは『ソーサリー・ブースター』のような人門を部品として魔法的な道具を作り出す技術、『ジェネレーター』のような人間を道具に変える技術、死体を操作する魔法『僵尸術』である。そしてもう一つ、彼は

不老の術法も得意とする。だがそれは、見掛け上の不老を保証するだけで、長寿を保証するものではない。この術法は、顧傑が崑崙方院で開発し、古式魔法師が崑崙方院を追われる原因となった魔法でもあった。

一条将輝転校日記とは――？

国立魔法大学付属第三高校の男子生徒であり、新ソビエト連邦による恣意侵攻事件にて「クリムゾン・プリンス」の異名を受けた、一条家の長男で次期当主、一条将輝が密かにしたためている日記のことである。

そこには、学業の合間に思いついた高度な魔法理論や、魔法師戦闘における戦術、十師族の今後など、俊才である彼独自の考えが綴られている……と言われている。

現在の彼は、父親である剛毅と第三高校の前田校長の計らいによって、達也や潔が所属する第一高校に通っている。そのため、日記にはそこまでの出来事が書き記していると考えられる。

ちなみに、親友であるカーディナル・ジョージこと吉祥寺赤紅郎ですらも、その存在を知らない。

*The irregular
at magic high school*

Gu Jie's Covert Maneuvers

Gu Jie, alias Jiedo Heigu, had kept an eye on Japan for many years, watching carefully for his opportunity.

The anti-magic organization that he acted as leader of, “Blanche”, had fabricated the organization “Egalite” within the First High School, to cause an uproar about a revolution.

In the previous year's Nine Schools Competition, Gu Jie used the “No Head

Dragon”, an international crime syndicate created with the support of Richard Sun, to send “Generators”, living weapons that used the bodies of magicians, to the competition grounds. (Furthermore, he also provided dangerous magical supplementation devices known as ‘Sorcery Boosters’, which amplified the destructive power of magic).

Gu Jie’s last disciple, Zhou Gongjin, provided guidance to the Great Asian Union Demolition Squadron, responsible for the Yokohama Disturbance, and he also caused the previous year’s “Parasite Doll” incident at the Nine Schools Competition, causing chaos.

Finally, the “puppet terror” at this year’s family conference grounds was brought about by corpse-manipulation magi Jie’s specialty.

All this for the purpose of revenge against the Yotsuba Family, and the Japanese magical world. But the motives for such actions were not yet clear, even to himself. The Kunlunfang Institute had been hostile towards Gu Jie as a result of a difference in thinking between ancient magic and modern magic, and the Yotsuba Family had pursued the Institute until its destruction. The Yotsuba Family should have instead been the "enemy of his enemy", but... Perhaps it was because of his patriotism, or perhaps it was because he bore an unreasonable grudge at having the target of his revenge stolen away from him... As assessed by Zhou Gongjin while he was alive, the only thing that could be known for sure was that Gu Jie's mental state was delusionally fanatical, like that of a vengeful spirit.

Gu Jie’s Special Abilities

Gu Jie's specialties included techniques for creating "Sorcery Boosters", magical devices that utilized humans as the components, a technique for creating human tools such as "Generators", and "Necromancy" that allowed him to manipulate corpses. He was also skilled in the "Surgery of Perpetual Youth." However, he could only preserve 'apparent' immortality and not actually extend one's lifespan. Gu Jie developed these immortality techniques at the Kunlunfang Institute, and this surgery was one of the reasons that the ancient magicians were banished from the Kunlunfang Institute.

What's "Ichijou Masaki's Transfer Student Diary"?

A secret diary kept by Ichijou Masaki, the eldest son of the Ichijou family and the next family head. Known as the "Crimson Prince" as a result of the New Soviet Union's invasion of the island of Sado, he was a student of the Third High School.

This diary was composed of his uniquely genius thoughts on advanced magic theories that he came up with between his studies, tactics for magical warfare, thoughts about the future of the Ten Master Clans, and more... or so the rumors go.

Thanks to arrangements made by his father Gouki and Principal Maeda of the Third High School, he is currently attending the First High School, where Tatsuya and Miyuki are enrolled. For this reason, it is thought that the incidents occurring there are also recorded within his diary.

Incidentally, even his best friend Kichijouji Shinkurou nickname "Cardinal George", does not know of its existence.



魔法科高校の19

劣等生

帥族会議編(下)

佐島 勤
Tsutomu Sato
illustration
石田可奈
Kana Ishida

ある欠陥を抱える劣等生の兄。
全てが完全無欠な優等生の妹。
二人の兄妹が魔法科高校に入学した時から、
波乱の日々の幕が開いた――。

Character

キャラクター紹介



吉田幹比古

よしだ・みきこ
2年B組。今年から一科生となる。
古式魔法の名家。
エリカとは幼少時からの顔見知り。



光井ほのか

みつい・ほのか
2年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
光波振動系魔法が得意。
思い込むとやや直情的。



北山 平

きたやま・しずく
2年A組。深雪のクラスメイト。
振動・加速系魔法が得意。
感情の起伏をあまり表に出さない。

司波達也

しば・たつや
2年E組。新設された
魔工科に進学した。
全てに遠慮している。
妹・深雪の『ガーディアン』。



司波深雪

しば・みゆき
2年A組。達也の妹。
昨年主席入学した優等生。
冷却魔法が得意。兄を溺愛する。



西城レオンハルト

さいじょう・れおんはると
2年F組。達也の友人。
二科生生徒。硬化魔法が得意な、
明るい性格の持ち主。



千葉エリカ

ちば・えりか
2年F組。達也の友人。
二科生生徒。チャームングな
トラブルメーカー。



柴田美月

しばた・みづき
2年E組。今年も達也と
同じクラスになった。
量子放射光過敏症。
少し天然が入った真面目な少女。





英美=アメリカ=
ゴールドイ=明智

えいみ・あめりあ・
ゴールドイ・あけち
2年B組。クォーター。
普段は『エイミー』と
呼ばれている。
名門ゴールドイ家の子女。



森崎 駿

もりさき・しゅん
2年A組。降雪の
クラスメイト。CAD早撃ちが得意。
一科生としてのプライドが高い。

里美スバル

さとみ・すばる
2年D組。
美少年と見まごう少女。
明るくノリの良い性格。



桜小路紅葉

さくらこうじ・あかは
2年B組。スバル、エイミーの友達。
私服はゴスロリ風で、
テーマパーク好き。



ト三束 鋼

とみつか・はがね
2年E組。『レンジ・ゼロ』(射撃距離ゼロ)の異名を持つ。
『マーシャル・マジック・アーツ』の使い手。



七草真由美

ななぐさ・まゆみ
卒業生。今は魔法大学生。
小悪魔的な性格を
持つものの、
攻められると弱い。

中条あずさ

なかじょう・あずさ
三年生。前・生徒会会長。
オドオドした性格で
引っ込み思案。



市原鈴音

いちはら・すずね
卒業生。今は魔法大学生。
冷静沈着な頭脳派。

服部刑部少丞範蔵

はっとり・ぎょうぶしょうじょう・はんざう
三年生。前・部活連会長。
優秀だが、生真面目
すぎる一面も。



渡辺摩利

わたなべ・まり
卒業生。真由美の親友。
物事全般にやや好感的。

十文字克人

じゅうもんじ・かつと
卒業生。現在は
魔法大学に進学している。
達也曰く「寂(いわお)のような人物」。

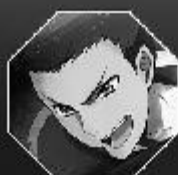




関本 勲

せきもと・いさお

卒業生。元・風紀委員。
論文コンペ校内選考次点。
スパイ行為を犯した人物。



桐原武明

きりはら・たけあき

三年生。剣術部所属。
関東剣術大会中等部の
チャンピオン。



壬生紗耶香

みぶ・さやか

三年生。剣道部所属。
中等部剣道大会女子部の
全国二位。



七草香澄

ななぐさ・かすみ

今年、魔法科高校に入学した
「新入生」。七草真由美の妹。
泉美の双子の姉。
元気で快活な性格。



七草泉美

ななぐさ・いずみ

今年、魔法科高校に
入学した「新入生」。
七草真由美の妹。
香澄の双子の妹。
大人しく穏やかな性格。

關守賢人

すみず・けんと

1年G組。両親がUSNAから
日本に帰化した、白人の少年。

辰巳銅太郎

たつみ・どうたろう

卒業生。元・風紀委員。
豪快な性格の持ち主。



沢木 碧

さわき・みどり

三年生。風紀委員。
女性的な名前が
コンプレックス。



五十里 啓

いそり・けい

三年生。前・生徒会会計。
魔法理論に優れている。
花音とは許嫁同士。



千代田花音

ちよだ・かのん

三年生。前・風紀委員長。
先輩の摩利同様に
好戦的。



七宝琢磨

しっぽう・たくま

今年の「新入生」新代を
務める生徒。一科生。
有力魔法師の家系
「師範十八家」のひとつ
「七宝」の長男。



桜井水波

さくらい・みなみ

今年、魔法科高校に入学した
「新入生」。遥也、深雪の
従妹という立場をとる。
深雪のガーディアン候補。





安宿怜美

あすか・さとみ
第一高校保健医。
おっとりホソワカした笑顔が
男子生徒に人気。

平河小春

ひらかわ・こはる
卒業生。
昨年の九校戦ではエンジニアで参加。
論文コンペメンバーを辞退。



甘楽計夫

つづら・かずお
第一高校教師。
専門は魔法幾何学。
論文コンペの世話役。

平河千秋

ひらかわ・ちあき
2年E組所属。
達也に敬意を向ける。



ジェニファー・スミス

日本に帰化した白人。達也のクラスと
魔法工学の授業の指導教師。

千倉朝子

ちくら・ともこ
三年生。九校戦新競技
『シールド・ダウン』の女子ソロ代表。



小野 遙

おの・はるか
第一高校に所属する
総合カウンセラー。
いじられ気質だが、
雲の顔も持つ。

五十嵐亜実

いがらし・つぐみ
卒業生。元バياسロン部部长。

五十嵐應輔

いがらし・ようすけ
二年生。亜実の弟。
やや気弱な性格。



九重八雲

ここのえ・やくも
古式魔法「忍術」の使い手。
達也の休術の師匠。

三七上ケリー

みなかみ・ケリー
三年生。九校戦『モノリス・コード』
本戦の男子代表。

上野

こうづけ
東京を地盤にする与党の若手政治家。
魔法師に好意的な議員として
知られている。

神田

かんだ
民権党に所属している若手政治家。
国防軍に対して批判的な
人権派である。反魔法主義でもある。



一条剛毅

いちじょう・ごうき
将輝の父親。十師族・
一条家の現当主。

一条将輝

いちじょう・まさき
第三高校の二年生。
今年も九校戦に出場。
十師族・一条家の次期当主。



一条美登里

いちじょう・みどり
将輝の母親。
温和な性格で
料理上手。

吉祥寺真紅郎

きちじょうじ・しんくろう
第三高校の二年生。
今年も九校戦に出場。
「カーディナル・ジョージ」の
異名で知られている。



一条 茜

いちじょう・あかね
一条家の長女。将輝の妹。
今年地元の名門私立中学に入学。
真紅郎に好意を抱く。

北山 潮

きたやま・うしお
中の父親。実業界の大物。
ビジネスネームは北方洞。



一条瑠璃

いちじょう・るり
一条家の次女。将輝の妹。
マイペースなしっかりもの。

北山紅音

きたやま・べにお
中の母親。かつては、
振動系魔法で名を馳せた
Aランクの魔法師。

北山 航

きたやま・わたる
潮の弟。小学六年生。
姉をよく慕っている。
魔法技師を目指す。



鳴瀬晴海

なるせ・はるみ
平の従兄。国立魔法大学付属
第四高校の生徒。



ピクシー

魔法科高校が所有する
ホームヘルパーのロボット。
正式名称は3H
(Humanoid Home Helper :
人型家事手伝いロボット)・タイプP94。



牛山

うしやま
フォア・リープス・
テクノロジーCAD開発
第三課主任。
這也が信頼を置く人物。

千葉寿和

ちば・としかず
千葉エリカの長兄。
警察省のキャリア組。
一見は遊び人風。



エルンスト・ローゼン

有数のCADメーカー、
ローゼン・マジクラフト
日本支社長。

千葉修次

ちば・なおつぐ
千葉エリカの次兄。摩利の恋人。
千刃流剣術免許皆伝で
「千葉の劇魔児」の異名をとる。



九島 烈

くどう・れつ
世界最強の魔法師の
一人と目されていた人物。
敬意を以て「老師」と
呼ばれる。

稲垣

いながき
警察省の警部補。
千葉寿和の部下。



九島真言

くどう・まこと
日本魔法界の長老・九島烈の
息子で、九島家の現当主。

アンナ＝ ローゼン＝鹿取

あんな・ろーぜん・かとり
エリカの母。旧姓のハーフで、
エリカの父・千葉家当主の
「妻」だった人物。



九島光宣

くどう・みのる
真言の息子。国立魔法大学
付属第二高校の一年生だが、
病気がちで頻りに欠席している。
藤林響子の異父弟でもある。

九鬼 鎮

くき・まもる
九島家に従う師範十八家の一つ。
九島烈を先生と呼び
敬っている。

小和村真紀

さわむら・まき
止棺ある映画賞の
主演女優部門に
ノミネートされるほどの女優。
美貌だけでなく、演技も認められている。





周公瑾

しゅうこうきん

大連連合の
呂と陳を接近に手引きした
美貌の青年。中華街に
巣くっていた、謎の人物。



陳祥山

チェンシャンシェン

大連連合軍
特殊工作部隊隊長。
非情な性格の持ち主。



呂剛虎

ルウガンブ

大連連合軍特殊工作部隊
所屬のエース魔法師。
別名「人喰い虎」。



リン

森崎が助けた少女。フルネームは
「孫美鈴(スンメイリン)」。
香港系同僚犯罪
シンジケート「無頭章」の
新たなリーダー。

風間玄信

かざま はんのぶ

陸軍101旅団・
独立魔装大隊・隊長。
階級は中佐。



真田繁留

さみた しばる

陸軍101旅団・
独立魔装大隊・幹部。
階級は少佐。



藤林響子

ふじばやし きょうこ

風間の副官を務める
女性士官。階級は中尉。



佐伯広海

さえき ひろみ

国防陸軍第101旅団旅団長。階級は少将。
独立魔装大隊隊長・風間玄信の上官。
その風貌から「銀狐」の異名を持つ。



柳 連

やなぎ むらじ

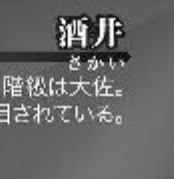
陸軍101旅団・
独立魔装大隊・幹部。
階級は少佐。



山中辛典

やまなか こうすけ

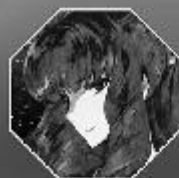
陸軍101旅団・独立魔装大隊・幹部。
軍医少佐。一級の治癒魔法師。



酒井

さかい

国防陸軍総司令部所屬。階級は大佐。
対大連連合強襲派と目されている。



四葉真夜

よつば・まや
運也と深雪の叔母。
深夜の双子の妹。
四葉家の現当主。

司波深夜

しば・みや
運也と深雪の未婚。故人。
精神構造干涉魔法に長けた
唯一の魔法師。



葉山

はやま
真夜に生える
老練の執事。

桜井穂波

さくらい・ほなみ
深夜の「ガーディアン」の故人。
遺伝子操作により魔法資質を
強化された調整体魔法師
「咲」シリーズの第一世代。



新発田勝成

しばた・かつしげ
元・四葉家次期当主候補の
一人。防衛省の職員。
第五高校のOB。
収束系魔法を得意とする。

司波小百合

しば・さゆり
運也と深雪の養母。
二人を母愛している。



堤 琴鳴

つつみ・ことな
新発田勝成のガーディアン。
調整体「楽師シリーズ」の
第二世代。音に関する魔法に
高い適性を持つ。

津久葉夕歌

つくば・ゆうか
元・四葉家次期当主候補の一人。
第一高校の元・生徒会副会長。
魔法大学四年生で
精神干涉系魔法が得意。



堤 奏太

つつみ・かなた
新発田勝成の
ガーディアン。調整体
「楽師シリーズ」の第二世代。
琴鳴の弟で、彼女と同じく
音に関する魔法に
高い適性を持つ。

吉見

よしみ
黒羽家と縁戚関係にある四葉の魔法師。
人体に残された量子情報体の
痕跡を読み取るライコメトリスト。
極度の秘密主義。

アンジェリーナ=クドウ=シールズ

USNAの魔法師部隊「スターズ」総隊長。
階級は少佐。愛称はリーナ。
戦術級魔法師「十三使徒」の一人でもある。



ヴァージニア・パランス

USNA統合参謀本部情報部内部監査局第一副局長。
階級は大佐。リーナを支援するため日本にやってきた。

シルヴィア・マーキュリー・ファースト

USNAの魔法師部隊「スターズ」惑星級魔法師。階級は准尉。
愛称はシルヴィアで、「マーキュリー・ファースト」はコードネーム。
日本での作戦時は、シリウス少佐の補佐役を務める。



ベンジャミン・カノープス

USNAの魔法師部隊「スターズ」ナンバー・ツー。
階級は少佐。シリウス少佐が不在時は
総隊長を代行する。

ミカエラ・ホンゴウ

USNAより日本に送り込まれた諜報員
(ただし本職は国防総省所属の魔法研究者)。
愛称はミア。



クレア

ハンターQ——「スターズ」になれなかった
魔法師部隊「スターダスト」の女兵士。
Qは追跡部隊の17番目を意味する。

レイチェル

ハンターR——「スターズ」になれなかった
魔法師部隊「スターダスト」の女兵士。
Rは追跡部隊の18番目を意味する。

USNAの魔法師部隊「スターズ」一等星魔法師。

階級は中尉。愛称はフレディ。
スターズを脱走。

アルフレッド・ フォーマルハウト

チャールズ・サリバン

USNAの魔法師部隊「スターズ」
衛星級魔法師。「デーモス・セカンド」の
コードネームで呼ばれる。
スターズを脱走。



レイモンド・S・クラーク

中が留学したUSNAバークレーにある高校の同級生。
なにがにつけ、早にモーションを掛けてくる、
白人の少年。その正体は
『七賢人』の一人。

顧傑

グ・ジー

『七賢人』の一人。
ジード・ヘイグとも呼ばれる、
大漢軍方術士部隊の生き残り。



黒羽 貢

くろば・みつぐ

可波深夜、四葉重夜の従弟。
重夜子、文弥の父。

近江円磨

おうみ・かずきよ

『反魂術』に詳しいという魔法研究家で、
『人形術』とあだ名される古式魔法師。
死体を探り人形に変える
禁断の魔法を使うと噂される。



黒羽重夜子

くろば・あやこ

達也と深雪の再従妹(はとこ)に
あたる少女。文弥という
双子の弟を持つ。
第四高校の生徒。

ジョー=杜

ジョー・ドゥ

魔界の逃走を
手助けする謎の男。
十郎族の魔法師たちから
身を隠すという困難な仕事も
手際よくこなすが、
その能力は高い。



黒羽文弥

くろば・ふみや

元・四葉家の次期当主候補。
達也と深雪の再従弟(はとこ)にあたる少年。
重夜子という双子の弟を持つ。
第四高校の生徒。

七草弘一

さへくさ・こういち

真由美の父で、七草家当主。
超一流の魔法師でもある。



名倉三郎

なぐら・きぶろう

七草家に雇われている強力な魔法師。
主に真由美の身辺警護をしていた。

三木舞衣

ふたつぎ・まい

十師族「三木家」当主。兵庫県戸屋在住。
表の職業は複数の化学工業、食品工業会社の大株主。
阪神・中国地方を監視、守護している。



三矢 元

みつや・げん

十師族「三矢家」当主。神奈川県厚木在住。
表の職業(と言えるかどうかは微妙なところだが)は、
国際的な小型兵器ブローカー。
今も稼働する第三初の
運用を担当している。

五輪勇海

いつわ・いさみ

十師族「五輪家」当主。愛媛県宇和島在住。
表の職業は海運会社の重役で実質オーナー。
四国地方を監視、守護している。



六塚温子

むつづか・あつこ

十師族「六塚家」当主。宮城県仙台在住。
表の職業は地熱発電所運営会社の実質オーナー。
東北地方を監視、守護している。

八代雷蔵

やつしろ・らいぞう

十師族「八代家」当主。福岡県在住。
表の職業は大学の講師で複数の通信会社の大株主。
沖縄を除く九州地方を監視、守護している。



十文字和樹

じゅうもんじ・かずき

十師族「十文字家」の元・当主。東京都在住。
表の職業は国防軍を得意先とする土木建設会社のオーナー。
七草家と共に伊豆を含む関東地方を監視、守護している。

東道青波

とうどう・あおば

八雲からは「青波入道閣下(せいはいにゅうどうがっか)」と呼ばれる。
僧侶のように剃髪した老人だが、素性は不明。
八雲曰く四葉家のスポンサーであるらしい。

Glossary

用語解説

魔法科高校

国立魔法大学付属高校の通称。全国に九校設置されている。この内、第一から第三までが一年生定員二百名で、一科・二科制を採っている。

ブルーム、ウィード

第一高校における一科生、二科生の格差を表す通称。一科生の制服の左胸には八枚花弁のエンブレムが刺繍されているが、二科生の制服にはこれが無い。

CAD〔シー・エー・ディー〕

魔法活動を簡略化させるデバイス。内部には魔法のプログラムが記録されている。特化型、汎用型などタイプ・形状は様々。

フォア・リーブス・テクノロジー〔FLT〕

国内CADメーカーの一つ。元々完成品よりも魔法工学部品で有名だったが、シルバー・セダルの開発により一躍CADメーカーとしての知名度が増した。

トーラス・シルバー

僅か一年の間に特化型CADのソフトウェアを十作は進歩させたと称えられる天才技術者。

エイドス〔個別情報体〕

元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてエイドスとは、事象に付随する情報体のことで、「存在」にその「事象」が存在することの記録で、「事象」が「世界」に記す足跡とも言える。現代魔法学における「魔法」の定義は、エイドスを改変することによって、その本体である「事象」を改変する技術とされている。

アイデア〔情報体次元〕

元々はギリシア哲学用語。現代魔法学においてアイデアとは、エイドスが記録されるプラットフォームのこと。魔法の一次的形態は、このアイデアというプラットフォームに魔法式を出力して、そこに記録されているエイドスを書き換える技術である。

起動式

魔法の設計図であり、魔法を構築するためのプログラム。CADには起動式のデータが圧縮保存されており、魔法師から流し込まれたサイオン波を展開したデータによって信号化し、魔法師に返す。

サイオン〔想予〕

心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、認識や思考結果を記録する情報素子のこと。現代魔法の理論的基盤であるエイドス、現代魔法の根幹を支える技術である起動式や魔法式はサイオンで構築された情報体である。

ブシオン〔電子〕

心霊現象の次元に属する非物質粒子で、その存在は認識されているがその正体、その機能については未だ解明されていない。一般的な魔法師は、活性化したブシオンを「感じる」ことができるにとどまる。

魔法師

「魔法技術師」の略称。魔法技術師とは、実用レベルで魔法を行使するスキルを持つ者の総称。

魔法式

事象に付随する情報を一時的に改変する為の「情報」。魔法師が保有するサイオンで構築されている。



一科生のエンブレム



司波達也のCAD



司波深雪のCAD

魔法演算領域

魔法式を構築する精神領域。魔法という名の、いわば本体。魔法師の無意識領域に存在し、魔法師は通常、魔法演算領域を意識して使うことは出来ても、そこで行われている処理のプロセスを意識することは出来ない。魔法演算領域は、魔法師自身にとってもブラックボックスと言える。

魔法式の出力プロセス

- ①起動式をCADから受信する。これを「起動式の誘込」という。
- ②起動式に変数も追加して魔法演算領域に送る。
- ③起動式と変数から魔法式を構築する。
- ④構築した魔法式を、無意識領域の最上層にして意識領域の最下層たる「リート」に転送、意識と無意識の狭間に存在する「ゲート」から、イデアへ出力する。
- ⑤イデアに出力された魔法式は、指定された空間のエイドスに干渉しこれを書き換える。

単一系統・単一工程の魔法で、この五段階のプロセスを半秒以内で完了させることが、「実用レベル」の魔法師としての目安になる。

魔法の評価基準(魔法力)

サイオン精神体を構築する速さが魔法の処理能力であり、構築できる情報体の規模が魔法のキャパシティであり、魔法式がエイドスを書き換える強さが干渉力。この三つを総合して魔法力と呼ばれる。



基本コード仮説

「収束」「加重」「移動」「振動」「収束」「発散」「吸収」「放出」の四系統八種にそれぞれ対応したプラスとマイナス、合計十六種類の基本となる魔法式が存在していて、この十六種類を組み合わせて全ての系統魔法を構築することができるという理論。

系統魔法

四系統八種に属する魔法のこと。

系統外魔法

物質的な現象ではなく精神的な現象を操作する魔法の総称。心霊不在を操縦する神霊魔法・霊霊魔法から読心、身体分離、意識操作まで多岐にわたる。

十師族

日本で最強の魔法師集団。一条(いちじょう)、一之宮(いちのみや)、一色(いっしき)、二木(ふたぎ)、三階堂(さんかいどう)、三根(さんねい)、三矢(みやや)、三日月(みかづき)、四舞(よまひ)、五輪(いっわ)、五郎(ごろう)、五味(いっみ)、六郎(むつむ)、六角(ろっかく)、六郷(ろくごう)、六本木(ろっぽんぎ)、七草(さえずき)、七宝(しっぽう)、七夕(ななばた)、七瀬(ななせ)、八代(やっしろ)、八朗(はっさく)、八橋(はちばし)、九島(くどう)、九東(くどう)、九段(くずみ)、十文字(じゅうもんじ)、十山(とおやま)の二十八の家系から四年に一度の「十師族選士会議」で選ばれた十の家系が「十師族」を名乗る。

数字付き

十師族の苗字に十から十までの数字が入っているように、百家の中でも本流とされている家系の苗字には「十」が付く。「十」は「十」里、「十」本「十」家のように、十一以上の数字が入っている。数字の大小が力の強弱を表すものではないが、苗字に数字が入っているかどうかは、血筋が大きく異なる。魔法師の力量を推測する一つの目安となる。

数字落ち

エクストラ・ナンバーズ、略して「エクストラ」ともいわれる。「数字」を剝奪された魔法師の一族。かつて、魔法師が兵装であり武器体シンボルであった頃、「成功例」としてナンバーをうえられた魔法師が、「成功例」に相応しい成果を上げられなかった為に残された烙印。

様々な魔法

●コキュートス

精神を凍結させる系統外魔法。凍結した精神は肉体に死を命じることも出来ず、この魔法を掛けられた相手は、精神の「静止」に伴い肉体も停止・凍結してしまう。精神と肉体の相互作用により、肉体の部分的な結晶化が観測されることもある。

●地鳴り

独立情報体「精霊」を媒体として地面を振動させる古式魔法。

●術式解散[ダラム・ディスページョン]

魔法の本体である魔法式を、意味の有る構造を持たないサイオン粒子に分解する魔法。魔法式は事象に付随する情報体に作用するという性質上、その情報構造が壊れていなければならず、魔法式そのものに対する干渉を防ぐ干渉は無い。

●術式解体[グラム・デモリッション]

圧縮したサイオン粒子の塊をアイデアを経由せずに対象物へ直接ぶつけて爆発させ、それに付け加えられた振動式や魔法式などの、魔法を記録したサイオン情報体を吹き飛ばしてしまう無系統魔法。魔法といっても、事象変化のための魔法式としての構造を持たないサイオンの組替であるため情報強化や領域干渉には影響されない。また、砲弾自体の持つ圧力がキャスト・ジャミングの影響も受けてしまう。物理的な作用が苦無である故に、どんな障害物でも防ぐことは出来ない。

●地雷原

土、岩、砂、コンクリートなど、材質は問わず、とにかく「地面」という概念を有するものに強い振動を与える魔法。

●地割れ

独立情報体「精霊」を媒体として地面を線上に押し潰し、一見地面を引き裂いたかのような外観を作り出す魔法。

●ドライ・ブリザード

空気中の二酸化炭素を集め、ドライアイスの粒子を作り出し、凝結過程で余った熱エネルギーを運動エネルギーに変換してドライアイス粒子を高速で飛ばす魔法。

●近い寄る雷龍[スリザリン・サンダーズ]

「ドライ・ブリザード」のドライアイス気化によって水蒸気を凝結させ、気化した二酸化炭素を溶け込ませた可燃性の高い霧を作り出したことで、振動系魔法と放出系魔法で摩擦電気を発生させる。そして、炭酸ガスが溶け込んだ霧や水油を導線として敵に電撃を浴びせるコンビネーション魔法。

●ニブルヘイム

振動減速系広域魔法。大容積の空気を冷却し、それを移動させることで広い範囲を凍結させる。厳密に言えば、超大型の冷凍庫を作り出すようなものである。運動時に生じる白い霧は空中で凍結した水やドライアイスの粒子だが、レベルを上げると凝結した液体窒素の霧が混じることもある。

●爆裂

対象物内部の液体を気化させる発散系魔法。生物ならば体液が気化して身体が爆散。内蔵機関動力の機械ならば燃料が気化して爆散する。燃料電池でも燃料は同じで、可燃性の燃料を搭載していなくても、バッテリー液や油圧液や冷却液や潤滑油など、およそ液体を溜めしていない機械は存在しないため、「爆裂」が発動すればほぼあらゆる機械が破壊され停止する。

●乱れ髪

角度を指定して風向きを変えて行くのではなく、「もつれさせる」という曖昧な結果をもたらす気流操作により、地面すれすれの気流を起こして相手の足に草を絡みつかせる古式魔法。ある程度丈の高い草が生えている野原でのみ使用可能。



魔法剣

魔法による戦闘方法には魔法それ自体を武器にする類いの他に、魔法で武器を強化・操作する技法がある。詠や片欠などの刃の性質と組み合わせる術式が多数詠だが、日本では剣技と魔法を組み合わせる戦う「魔剣」も発達しており、現代魔法と古式魔法の双方に魔法剣とも言うべき専用の魔法が組み込まれている。

1. 高周波(こうしゅうは)ブレード

刀身を高速振動させ、接触物の分子結合力を超えた振動を伝播させることで、物体を断片的に液化化して切断する魔法。刀身の自壊を防止する術式とフックセットで使われる。

2. 圧斬り(へしきり)

刃先に斬撃方向に対して左右垂直方向の圧力を発生させ、刃が接触した物体を押し戻すように切断する魔法。圧力場の幅は1ミリ未満の小さなものだが光に干渉する程の強度がある為、正面から見ると刃先が黒い様になる。

3. ドウジ斬り(童子斬り)

源氏の秘剣として伝承されていた古式魔法。二本の刃を連動操作し、手に持つ刃と合わせて二本の刃で相手を取り囲むようにして同時に切りつける魔法剣技。本来の意味である「同時斬り」を「童子斬り」の名に隠していた。

4. 斬鉄(ざんてつ)

下等一門の秘剣。刃を鉄と鉄の塊ではなく、「刃」という単一概念の存在として認識し、魔法式で設定した斬撃線に沿って動かす移動系魔法。単一概念存在と定義された「刃」はあたかも単分子極品の刃の様に、折れることも曲がることも欠けることもなく、所望線に沿ってあらゆる物体を切り裂く。

5. 迅雷斬鉄(じんらいざんてつ)

専用の武装デバイス「雷刃(いかづちまゐり)」を用いた「斬鉄」の発展形。刃と剣を一つの集合概念として定義することで、接触から斬撃までの一連の動作が一切の遅延無く高速実行される。

6. 山津波(やまつなみ)

全長150センチの長大な専用武装「大蛇丸(おろちまる)」を用いた下等一門の秘剣。自分と刃に掛かる慣性を極小化して微にまで接近し、インパクトの瞬間、消えていた慣性を上昇させて刀身の慣性を増幅し対象物に叩きつける。この為りの慣性質量は加速が長ければ長いほど増大し、最大で十トンに及ぶ。

7. 薄刃鋸輪(うすばかぎり)

カーボンナノチューブを軸として作られた厚さリナノメートルの極薄シートを硬化魔法で完全平面に固定して刃とする魔法。薄刃鋸輪で作られた刃はどんな刀剣、どんな剣力よりも鋭い切れ味を持つが、刃を動かす為のサポートが術式に含まれていないので、術者は刃の操作技術と腕力を要求される。

魔法技能師開発研究所

西暦2030年代、第三次世界大戦前に緊迫化する国際情勢に対応して日本政府が次々に設立した魔法師開発の系の研究所。その目的は魔法の開発ではなくあくまでも魔法師の開発であり、目的とする魔法に最適な魔法師を産み出す為の遺伝子操作を含めて研究されていた。

魔法技能師開発研究所は第一から第十一までの10ヶ所設立され、現在も5ヶ所が稼働中である。各研究所の詳細は以下のとおり。

魔法技能師開発第一研究所

2031年、金沢市に設立。現在は閉鎖。

テーマは対人戦闘を想定した生体に直接干渉する魔法の開発。気化魔法「霧壁」はその派生形だ。ただし人体の動きを操作する魔法はバレット・デコ（通り人形化した人間によるカラカデモ）を誘発するものとして禁止されていた。

魔法技能師開発第二研究所

2031年、淡路島に設立。稼働中。

第一研のテーマと対をなす魔法として、無碍的に干渉する魔法、特に酸化還元反応に関わる吸収系魔法を開発。

魔法技能師開発第三研究所

2032年、厚木市に設立。稼働中。

単独で様々な状況に対応できる魔法師の開発を目的としてマルチキャストの研究を推進。特に、同時発動、連鎖発動が可能な魔法数の増強を策定し、多数の魔法を同時発現可能な魔法師を開発。

魔法技能師開発第四研究所

詳細は不明。場所は旧島野島と日山製鉄の廃墟付近と推定。設立は2033年と推定。現在は閉鎖されたことになっているが、これも実態は不明。旧第四研のみ政府とは別に、国に対し強い影響力を持つスポンサーにより設立され、現在に国から独立しそのスポンサーの支援下で運営されているとの噂がある。またそのスポンサーにより2020年代以前から事実上運営が滞っていたとも噂されている。

増強した魔法を利用して、魔法師の無意識領域に存在する魔法という名の異形の源泉、魔法計算領域そのものの進化を目標にしていたとされている。

魔法技能師開発第五研究所

2035年、四国の宇和島市に設立。稼働中。

物質の形状に干渉する魔法を開発。技術的難度が低い流体制御が主流となるが、固体の形状干渉にも成功している。その成果がUSNAと共同開発した「バハムート」。沿岸干渉魔法「アドス」と合わせ、二つの臨海域魔法を開発した魔法研究機関として国際的に名を馳せている。

魔法技能師開発第六研究所

2035年、仙台市に設立。稼働中。

魔法による質量制御を研究。第八研と並び基礎研究機関的な色彩が強く、その反面軍事的色彩は薄い。また第四研を除く魔法技能師開発研究所の中で、最も多く遺伝子操作実験が行われたと言われている（第五研については欠情報が不明）。

魔法技能師開発第七研究所

2036年、東京に設立。現在は閉鎖。

対集団戦闘を前提に置いた魔法を開発。その成果が許体制御魔法。第六研が軍事色彩の強かったのが反面で、有事の首都防衛を兼ねた魔法師開発の副産物として設立された。

魔法技能師開発第八研究所

2037年、北九州市に設立。稼働中。

魔法による重力、電磁力、強い相互作用、弱い相互作用の操作を研究。第六研以上に基礎研究機関的な色彩が強い。ただし、国防軍との結びつきは第六研と異なり強固。これは第八研の研究内容が核兵器の開発と密接に結びつくからであり、国防軍の承認付きを得て核兵器開発疑惑を免れているという側面がある。

魔法技能師開発第九研究所

2037年、奈良市に設立。現在は閉鎖。

現代魔法と古式魔法の融合、古式魔法のノウハウを現代魔法に取り込むことで、フレンジーな術式操作など現代魔法が苦手としている領域を開発しようとした。

魔法技能師開発第十研究所

2039年、東京に設立。現在は閉鎖。

第七研と同じく首都防衛の目的を兼ねて、大火力の攻撃に対する防御手段として空間に仮想構築物を生成する領域魔法を開発。その成果が多岐多様な対物理空間魔法。

また第十研は、第四研とは別の手段で魔法能力の引き上げを目標とした。具体的には魔法演算領域そのものの強化ではなく、魔法演算領域を一時的にオーバークロックすることで数秒に同じ能力な魔法を行役できる魔法師の開発に取り込んだ。ただしその成否は公開されていない。

これら10ヶ所の研究所以外にエレメンツ開発を目的とした研究所が2010年代から

2020年代にかけて稼働していたが、現在は全て閉鎖されている。

また国防軍には2002年に設立された陸軍総司令部直属の秘密研究機関があり独自に研究を続けている。九島烈は第九研に所属するまでの研究機関で強化措置を受けていた。

戦略級魔法師・十三使徒

現代魔法は高度な科学技術の中で育まれてきたものであるが、

軍事的に強力な魔法の開発が可能なのは限られている。

その結果、人型機械兵器に匹敵する戦略級魔法を開発できたのは一握りの国家だった。

既に開発した魔法を同盟国に供与することは行われており、

戦略級魔法に高い適性を示した同盟国の魔法師が戦略級魔法師として認められている例もある。

2095年4月以降で、国家により戦略級魔法に適性を認められ対外的に公表された魔法師は13名。

彼らは十三使徒と呼ばれ、世界の軍事バランスの重要ファクターと見なされていた。

十三使徒の所属国、氏名、戦略級魔法の名称は以下のとおり。

USNA

■アンジー・シリウス：「ヘビィ・メタル・バースト」

■エリオット・ミラー：「リヴァイアサン」

■ローラン・バルト：「リヴァイアサン」

※この中でスターズに所属するのはアンジー・シリウスのみであり、エリオット・ミラーはアラスカ基地、ローラン・バルトは国外のシブラルタル基地から基本的に動くことはない。

新ソビエト連邦

■イーゴリ・アンドレイビッチ・ベソブラゾフ：「トゥーマン・ボンバ」

■レオニード・コンドラチェンコ：「シムリヤー・アールミヤ」

※コンドラチェンコは高緯度の脅威、黒海基地から基本的に動くことはない。

大亜細亜連合

■劉雲徳(りゅううんとく)：「霹靂塔」

※劉雲徳は2095年10月31日の対日戦闘で戦死している。

インド・ペルシア連邦

■バラット・チャンドラ・カーン：「アグニ・ダウンバースト」

日本

■五輪 滯(いつわみお)：「深淵(アビス)」

ブラジル

■ミゲル・ディアス：「シンクロライナー・フュージョン」

※魔法式はUSNAより供与されたもの。

イギリス

■ウィリアム・マクロード：「オゾンサークル」

ドイツ

■カーラ・シュミット：「オゾンサークル」

※オゾンサークルはオゾンホール対策として分裂前のEUで共同研究された魔法を原型としており、イギリスで完成した魔法式が協定により旧EU諸国に公開された。

トルコ

■アリ・シャーヒーーン：「バハムート」

※魔法式はUSNAと日本の共同で開発されたものであり、日本主導で供与された。

タイ

■ソム・チャイ・ブンナーグ：「アグニ・ダウンバースト」

※魔法式はインド・ペルシアより供与されたもの。

The International Situation

2096 年現在の世界情勢



世界の寒冷化を直接の契機とする第三次世界大戦、二〇年世界権威戦争により世界の地図は大きく塗り替えられた。現在の状況は以下のとおり。

USAはカナダ及びメキシコからパナマまでの諸国を併合して北アメリカ大陸合衆国(USNA)を形成。

ロシアはウクライナ、ベラルーシを再吸収して新ソビエト連邦(新ソ連)を形成。

中国はビルマ北部、ベトナム北部、ラオス北部、朝鮮半島を征服して大亜細亜連合(大亜連合)を形成。

インドとイランは中央アジア諸国(トルクメニスタン、ウズベキスタン、タジキスタン、アフガニスタン)及び南アジア全土(パキスタン、ネパール、

ブータン、バングラデシュ、スリランカ)を呑み込んでインド・ペルシア連邦を形成。

他のアジア・アラブ諸国は地域ごとに軍事同盟を締結し新ソ連、大亜連合、インド・ペルシアの二大国に対抗。

オーストラリアは事実上の親国を選択。

EUは統合に失敗し、ドイツとフランスを境に東西分裂。東西EUも統合国家の形成に至らず、統合は戦前よりむしろ弱体化している。

アフリカは諸国の半分以上が国家ごと消滅し、生き残った国家も半壊して都市周辺の支配権を維持している状態となっている。

南アメリカはブラジルを除き地方政府レベルの小国分立状態に陥っている。

The irregular
at magic high school

Chapter 11

In an intersection between the station and First High, Humanists were activating Antinite, something inaccessible to civilians. With it, they were releasing Psion noise that interfered with the activation of magic.

Minami's expression contorted at the sound of Cast Jamming.

She grasped her chest and fell, facing down.

Her slender shoulders rose up and down as she struggled to breathe properly.

Her suffering figure reminded Miyuki of the memories from that summer day, five years ago.

August 11th, 2092, the events of Great Asian Union's assault on Okinawa.

During their insurrection, soldiers attacked while seeking refuge in the territory of the National Defense Force.

From her memories of that time, in order to "stop" an enemy, to "stop" all of their enemies, Honami was shot, her mother was shot, and even Miyuki herself was shot and was about to die.

At that time, the three of them were saved by Tatsuya's "Regrowth".

However, in the end, Honami didn't make it.

At this moment, there was Minami, the spitting image of Honami, suffering under the events of Cast Jamming. Suffering just like Honami had. The sight of her figure replaying the same scene as that day before Miyuki's eyes—

"...I won't allow it."

Miyuki murmured softly in a voice quaking in anger.

—To once again make "her" suffer.

—To once again take "her" away.

—I won't allow it.

—This time, I will stop them.

—This time for sure, I will stop all of them.

In a world where past and present blended together, Miyuki lost sight of herself. Driven by the regret and anger of the past, Miyuki tried to release her powers.

“Miyuki-sama, please stop!”

In the midst of pain, Minami’s strained voice stopped Miyuki’s rampant magic.

“Do you wish to defy Tatsuya-sama’s orders?”

Tatsuya’s words repeated in her heart, which had begun relinquishing all self-control.

—It would be bad if you, as the successor of the Yotsuba Family, used magic to act against a non-Magic using citizen—

Those were the words of Tatsuya last night. To Miyuki, Tatsuya’s orders took precedent, and suppressed the memories of “the scenes from that day”.

Miyuki’s magic, “Cocytus”, that could even “stop” the spirit, heart, and body was on the verge of being invoked, but dispersed with the mention of Tatsuya’s name.

“...Minami-chan?”

As if she had just woken up from a nightmare, Miyuki called out Minami’s name with an uneasy voice and expression.

“...I’m fine, Miyuki-sama.”

Minami forced a smile, trying to pacify her master despite the danger of that moment.

Giving up on casting “Deceleration” on the wall that shook from the effects of Cast Jamming, she concentrated on “Isolation”.

The hands of the attackers struck against an invisible wall. It was a sight that would arouse instinctive fear in any weak, young girl, but Minami ignored it, directing a firm gaze at Miyuki as cold sweat ran down her forehead.

Minami looked at Miyuki protestingly to tell her that she was fine and to keep her from doing anything rash.

At such a look, Miyuki gave a smile that seemed to say “I’m fine”.

Miyuki returned the CAD in her left hand to her breast pocket.

“Miyuki-senpai ...?”

While frowning at the Psion noise, she asked Miyuki in a wondering tone.

There was no way that Miyuki couldn’t resist the Cast Jamming.

Izumi believed so for no reason.

Unfortunately, Izumi herself had difficulty using magic, but if it was the “respected Miyuki Senpai,” then small fry of this level would be easily defeated. That was how much Izumi admired Miyuki.

Miyuki then nodded and gave a look that said “Don’t worry” to Izumi.

She then cast down her eyes and crossed her hands on her chest.

A tender radiance emanated from Miyuki’s body.

It was a light that the self-proclaimed humanist thugs could not see.

It was a non-physical light that only people of magical disposition could see. The Psion light radiated from Miyuki.

The light possessed no “power of influence”. Rather, it didn’t contain any intention. The light that Miyuki released was a “pure psion light” that held no qualities.

Psions that had no interference strength had no effect on phenomena.

Without harming Minami’s wall or the men trying to harm them, the radiance spread outwards.

Wrapped in the gentle light, Minami suddenly noticed that the pain from the Cast Jamming had lifted.

Cast Jamming was, first and foremost, a tool to hinder the activation of magic, but not to inflict damage on magicians. In the case of magicians with high Psion sensitivity, Cast Jamming caused a nauseating and dizzying effect.

No, a noise that could hinder the magic activation was no ordinary noise.

Magic activation was not related to the object of operation, but rather to the

origin of the operation, more specifically, the Magic Calculation Area in the subconscious of a magician.

Even if the sensitivity to Psions wasn't strong, the instant that the route of magic activation opened, the effect of the noise could not be avoided.

For barrier magics, small cycles of renewal were required to continue the (seemingly) continuous magic. Therefore, Magicians who use this kind of magic suffered more damage from Cast Damage.

Minami could feel the sickness caused by the noise of Cast Jamming on her mind and body subsiding. The effects were still there but her discomfort was half gone.

“Miyuki-sama...?”

Minami watched Miyuki's face and figure with renewed intensity. The only thing she knew was that this change was brought about by her master.

“Miyuki-senpai, amazing! You're using thick Psion curtains to drown out the waves from Cast Jamming!”

Izumi betrayed a voice of admiration, and Minami expressed her agreement, too. Psion clouds that had no interference could not stop magic, but against the Cast Jamming which had a similar nature and no phenomena interference, it acted as a thick cushion.

Izumi's voice was heard by the villainous men.

“Impossible! There is no magic that Cast Jamming can't penetrate!”

The leader of the humanists shouted with impatience. Unwittingly exposing his own ignorance, his words were humorous to Izumi and Minami. Since they felt this way, the two stopped hiding their amusement. Rather, the two never had the intention to do so.

Minami wore a faint smile without any intent behind it. In contrast, Izumi grinned widely, making it a point to mock the men.

It was indeed true that Cast Jamming was effective against most magic.

Though, the technique that Miyuki just performed wasn't 'true' magic.

Rather, it was a technique that released and controlled external Psions, which in a sense could be considered magic.

It was a magic that was not magic, that obstructed techniques meant to obstruct magic.

The degree of difficulty in the technique that Miyuki displayed, coupled with her talent as a magician, were both things that the ignorant members of the cult could never comprehend.

Of course, there remained the fact Cast Jamming was ineffective on other magic as well.

For example, magic that decomposed the structure of the Psions that interfered with magic activation.

Suddenly, the Antinite that had been releasing the Psion noise dissolved.

The irregular noise of Psion waves became uniform waves of Psions.

“Onii-sama!”

Miyuki opened her eyes and looked over.

There, Tatsuya stood with a Noh mask on his face, but both of his eyes were burning fiercely.



Today, Tatsuya had reached a dead end with his investigation and had decided to head towards Kamakura to try and track down the mastermind of the terrorist attack, Gu Jie.

He had already informed Katsuto that he would not be attending the meeting today. After Kamakura, he planned on heading towards Zama to once again check if any clues had been left behind.

If he got serious about finding Gu Jie, there was a more efficient and reliable way to do it.

Although it was only once, Tatsuya had ‘seen’ Gu Jie.

To clarify, Tatsuya did not have the power of clairvoyance. He was not adept at finding the presence of people that he did not have a connection with.

Since they never came into close contact, there wasn't much of a connection between them. The fact that Tatsuya had fought his student, Zhou Gongjin, would not serve to deepen the connection between Tatsuya and Gu Jie. Tatsuya also did not consider the fact that Maya was attacked to be an incident of much importance. If he allowed himself to form connections for such trivial matters, his sight would soon be clouded by the immense amount of information.

To track down an opponent that he had only 'seen' once, he would have to focus his perception on that target alone. He would have to remove his 'sight' from other targets that he was observing.

Which means, he would have to remove his 'sight' from Miyuki.

For Tatsuya, Gu Jie did not have that much value.

However, if there was something left behind that had a strong tie to Gu Jie, he could use that as a clue to track down the trail of information. If such a clue had been left behind, the other investigators would have found it long ago, but the current situation was so dire that even such a remote possibility had to be considered.

In spite of that, he turned back while he was on the way to Kamakura.

Not towards his house, but towards the school.

He did not have the power to see the future. His "eyes" could only allow him to look back in time only to a very short extent — to be precise only up to 24 hours — from the present.

That is why, this was just intuition. —That someone was attempting to harm Miyuki.

However, Tatsuya did not have the option of ignoring this feeling.

Because, compared to Miyuki, the matter with Gu Jie was meaningless to him.

He switched his bike into semi-automatic drive mode, transferred half of his sight into the information dimension so that he could rescue Miyuki at any time, and sped towards First High.



Although now, the sight of a group of ruffians keeping Miyuki trapped came

into Tatsuya's view.

Tatsuya neatly parked his bike, removed his helmet and slowly let out a breath.

If he did not calm himself down in this manner, he risked being unable to rein in his murderous intent against these insolent people.

An attempt to harm Miyuki was not something he could ever forgive.

Just knowing that his opponent had such thoughts would make Tatsuya want to erase them.

If he perceived any real threat to her, Tatsuya would not hesitate to kill.

He had the ability to completely destroy a person without leaving any evidence, after all.

Even if Antinite was used, he knew that it would only make Miyuki feel slightly uncomfortable, so he didn't have to pull the trigger in his heart.

The fact that Minami was suffering wasn't enough to elicit his killing intent.

Even so, Tatsuya couldn't just stand by and do nothing while a younger girl was in pain. Especially if the person in question was someone who was almost family. He activated a decomposition magic meant to erase the cast jamming that was causing Minami's suffering.

He didn't even need to use the circular-shaped CADs that he had on each wrist. 'Decomposition' is one of the two magics that he could wield freely. He did not even have to use the gestures that magicians used to settle their aim, such as 'pointing his fingers', or 'stretching out his arm towards his target'. Just by focusing his senses, he could set the target of his magic.

Gram Dispersion.

The magic that decomposes information bodies erased the complex structure of the Psion waves that interfered with the ability to use magic.

The structure of the jamming waves had been destroyed, and the waves turned into dull ripples then faded away.

"Onii-sama!"

He heard the voice of his sister calling out to him from within the crowd of people.

He could see Miyuki looking at him with eyes widened in surprise through the gaps in the crowd.

Tatsuya wondered why she was so surprised, and felt strange for a bit.

No matter how trivial it was, there was no way that he wouldn't come running whenever he sensed that Miyuki was in danger.

But his consciousness was instantly overwritten with rage.

Although it was faint, there were unmistakable traces of fear and unease on Miyuki's face.

A high school girl was surrounded and confined by a group of unknown men. Regardless of how much power she had, it was natural for her to be afraid.

He glared at the crowd of people and sucked in a breath.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Out of the way!"

Tatsuya spoke in a sharp and angry tone.

The men were staggered by the force contained within Tatsuya's voice, and the crowd split into two halves.

This was not the effect of a magic that affected the mind.

The men's bodies reacted faster than their minds when they heard the roar of a creature far more powerful than themselves.

Tatsuya walked briskly in a straight line.

He didn't even need to push his way through the crowd of men.

No one obstructed Tatsuya's way. No one even stretched a hand towards him.

"Minami."

Standing in front of the magical barrier, Tatsuya called Minami's name.

"Yes, Tatsuya-sama."

Minami responded to his voice while keeping the barrier active.

“Can you move while keeping that barrier up?”

“It is possible.”

Tatsuya should have known that Minami was capable of that. Minami took it to mean that Tatsuya was concerned about her present condition.

“I see. Then follow me as you are, you three.”

Tatsuya turned around. As he looked from one side to the other, the Humanists, frightened of that gaze, took one or two steps back.

“W-What are you doing! Jamming team, one more time!”

As expected, the Antinite rings were given to the most proficient members selected from among the group. At their leader’s shaken voice, the men gathered up the courage that had been broken by Tatsuya, poured Psions into their Antinite, and released Cast Jamming.

However, the structure of the Psion noise could not be maintained for even half a second.

Tatsuya just turned around while looking annoyed. He didn’t even wave his hands.

That was all it took for the cast jamming to lose its effectiveness.

It was a Psion noise that could inhibit all kinds of magic.

It was not something chaotic that was made by chance.

The noise from Cast Jamming was a wave pattern of Psions that followed a complicated set of rules in order to take shape.

As long as it has a structure, it cannot escape Tatsuya’s ‘Decomposition’. Even more so if it was simply a bare information body. Against Tatsuya, the Cast Jamming that could neutralize magicians didn’t even slow him down, so forget about it being a trump card.

“What!?”

The bearers of the rings shouted in dismay.

“Don’t falter! Once more!”

The fanatics’ leader repeated his meaningless order.

Tatsuya didn’t even turn around anymore.

As expected, the noise that impeded magic didn’t even last for half a second.

Cast Jamming was not a continuous emission of noise. It was a repetitive invocation wherein each burst of noise occurred before the previous one faded away.

It was a property of Antinite to convert the Psions injected into it into jamming waves that were released. However, continuously injecting Psions without the help of a mechanical device, like the one used in flying magic, is difficult even for regular magicians. This was why Cast Jamming was only used intermittently.

For non-magicians who were not used to controlling Psions, even injecting enough Psions to produce an effective jamming wave would take a considerable amount of mental concentration.

The noise was quashed as soon as it was invoked.

After doing this twice already, these young people did not have enough training to be able to immediately repeat it for a third time.

Tatsuya stopped walking and had the other three people go ahead of him.

They were already outside the crowd of Humanists.

“Minami.”

“Yes, Tatsuya-sama.”

“Well done. You can release the barrier now.”

Minami obeyed Tatsuya’s words and cancelled the barrier magic.

“Miyuki.”

After hearing Tatsuya call her name, Miyuki replied, “Yes, Onii-sama” with a meek voice.

“Go back to school with the both of them.”

“Yes, certainly.”

Miyuki gave Tatsuya a graceful bow, put a hand each on the backs of her underclassmen, and urged them to head back to First High.

At this point, the leader of the Humanists regained his senses.

“W-What are you doing! My comrades, do not allow those wicked people to escape!”

However, that only served to bring them to an unfortunate conclusion.

The group of Humanists ignored — no, avoided Tatsuya, and ran past him.

However, not one of them managed to take more than three steps ahead.

There were a total of fifteen men. Not all of them started running at the same time. At that time, only a third of the group, that is five people, had started to run. And now, the only ones who remained on their feet were the two-thirds who had not yet started to run.

Needless to say, the person who had caused one-third of the group who were guilty of capturing people and attempted violence (regarding their act of capturing people, it could be said that they were caught red-handed) was Tatsuya. However, this was not due to his magic.

The first person to step forward received a fist to the solar plexus and fainted while experiencing immense pain.

The second person was struck in the temple by the base of Tatsuya’s palm as he attempted to take a second step.

The third person had his neck grabbed from behind just as he took his second step, and was pulled backwards.

The fourth person received a blow to his chin as he was taking his third step.

The fifth person had his wrist grabbed as soon as he took his third step, and fell on the road after spinning one full circle in mid-air.

After experiencing Tatsuya’s barrage of fluid techniques, none of the men were able to get off the ground, let alone stand up.

“You bastard! Do you think you can get away with such violence!”

The leader of the ruffians threw a selfish outcry at Tatsuya.

To this, Tatsuya replied with a smile filled with hostility, provocation, and ridicule.

“I was just preemptively stopping an attack on women. The data captured by the street cameras should prove that these people attempted to assault female students of First High.”

Tatsuya deliberately directed his gaze at the camera installed on one of the streetlights. He then turned to the leader of the Humanists with a smile filled with scorn.

Even from afar, it was clear that the leader’s face had turned red.

Of course, this was not because he had realized the folly of his actions and felt ashamed. It was due to rage.

As expected of a fanatic, his eyes became bloodshot from his madness and he screamed while pointing at Tatsuya.

“Finish this guy off first! Divine punishment!”

His lackeys shouted “Oh!” with raised spirits. Rather, it blended into a strange clamor.

Their bodies understood that they could not stand against Tatsuya, and automatically withdrew.

However, their minds had been poisoned by fanaticism, and they were unable to comprehend the danger signals called “fear” that was being sent throughout their bodies.

“Realize your sins!”

The young man who was standing in the front ranks attempted to assault Tatsuya. He was holding a collapsible baton that had already been expanded.

Tatsuya used his left hand to strike from the inside at the man’s descending right hand. His sword-like hand hit the fingers holding the collapsible baton.

“Aargh!”

The baton went flying out of the young man’s hand. He bent forwards and

cried out in pain while holding his right hand.

Tatsuya's extended his right hand towards the young man's face. He wasn't moving at a speed that was too fast to follow. Rather, he was moving quite slowly.

From the side, Tatsuya thrust his thumb at the area directly below the man's ear.

The man ceased his cries of pain and his body crumpled to the ground.

"I'm warning you. If you keep attacking me, I can't hold back."

Without even sparing a glance at the young man sprawled at his feet, Tatsuya said so while looking around at the ruffians.

He didn't mean these words as a provocation. These were words of warning.

After Miyuki's safety was assured, Tatsuya had calmed down. He lost the will to proactively engage in violence.

Of course, that didn't mean he would try to avoid a fight. If he was attacked, he would surely neutralize his opponent. The reason he said those words was mainly in order to provide an alibi for the cameras that were recording the situation.

However, the people he said those words to took it as provocation.

"Stop messing around! You're just a tool!"

The leader of the Humanists thus acted in a detestable manner. However, his comrades were secretly exchanging looks amongst each other. At this point, the fear of fighting was starting to overcome their blind faith.

Even so, they didn't try to flee the scene. They had yet to recover enough to make sound judgement calls. They weren't under the impression that they would be given pardon for attacking a magician, rather they hadn't come to realize they were inferior in a fight.

This stalemate would probably work in Tatsuya's favor. On the way here, he saw that a crowd had formed near the police box as well. It was probably to stall the police. However, it was around time for the police to start showing up.

“The police will be here soon. Why don’t you just run away? You perverts who attempted to assault women.”

Tatsuya gave them a warning once again. This time, however, it seemed like he was inciting them. Tatsuya himself didn’t see any reason to be careful of how he worded his sentence.

The fanatics easily flew into a rage.

“This brat!”

The leader let out a shriek as he himself rushed to attack Tatsuya.

Tatsuya narrowed his eyes at the weapon he took out from an inside pocket of his jacket. It was a stun whip that was approximately fifty centimeters in length. By passing electricity through it, not only would it produce an electric discharge from the tip, but it could also become more resilient and take the shape of a flexible leaf spring. However, once the switch was turned off, its state would change to something similar to a leather belt that could be wrapped around one’s hand or body, allowing it to be carried discreetly and unnoticed from the outside.

This was the cane sword developed by Erika’s family (A club made from shape-memory alloy that transforms into a short sword). It was just beginning to be adapted by the police, and was not yet commercially available to the general public. It wasn’t something that could be obtained unless you had connections with the police or the manufacturers themselves. Perhaps, he had stolen it from a policeman.

Investigating this could yield interesting results. While thinking of such things at a corner of his mind, he dodged the stun whip that was being swung down. Along with taking a step, he spun his body and got behind his ‘enemy’.

From his opponent’s perspective, it must have seemed like the weapon passed right through Tatsuya’s body.

“Over here.”

Tatsuya called out to the young man before he could discover Tatsuya’s location.

The Humanists' leader spun around in a panic. He must have thought that he would be attacked in return if he didn't do anything. He recklessly waved the stun whip about.

Tatsuya raised his arm and pretended to block the whip. Just before the whip made contact, he withdrew his arm.

To begin with, Tatsuya had already retreated beyond the range of the stun whip. The exaggerated attack from an unstable position ended in failure, and the young man lost his balance and fell on his behind.

Tatsuya let out a chuckle. It was not meant as an insult. Rather, at least, Tatsuya had no such intention. He just naturally laughed after seeing this display of excessive clumsiness. Tatsuya had no intention of deliberately insulting the young man before him, but he also didn't have any obligation to control his expressions out of consideration for his opponent's feelings.

It couldn't be helped, even if the leader of the Humanists took Tatsuya's chuckle as an insult.

"I'll kill you!"

However, he had gotten into a fit of excessive madness. What's more, the young man's hostility wasn't restricted to his words alone. He threw the useless whip aside and stuck his right hand into his coat pocket.

Just as his hand left his pocket, Tatsuya's right leg moved at lightning speed.

Tatsuya stomped down on the fanatic's right hand instead of kicking it away.

Tatsuya's heel swung succinctly downwards and knocked the weapon out of the fanatic's hand.

Instead of putting his right foot back on the ground, he shot it forwards.

After taking a front kick on his face, The Humanists' leader's head snapped back and he fell down forcefully. It wasn't clear if he lay there without moving due to the impact of the kick, or because of the extreme impact inflicted on back of his head the moment he fell down.

However, even if he had been hit at a bad place, the police probably wouldn't blame Tatsuya.

Lying on the road was a small gun with two barrels positioned one above the other. Even now, at the end of the 21st century, the palm-sized gun had continued to inherit the name ‘Derringer,’ and this was the latest model of it. Of course, for regular civilians, carrying around one of these was a crime with no room for excuses.

In fact, the Humanists were the ones who were in a daze as they looked at the gun lying on the road. All of them who were standing and were conscious had a look of disbelief on their faces. It looked like they never imagined that their leader was carrying a gun.

Tatsuya turned to look at the remaining fanatics.

All the fight had gone out of them. Not only that, it appeared that they didn’t even have the energy to run away.

Tatsuya judged that the matter was done and relaxed his fighting stance.

However, his expression immediately stiffened as he turned around and prepared to fight.

“Onii-sama!”

He didn’t even need the warning from Miyuki, who was watching him from the end of the street, he had already finished his preparations to use magic.

The leader of the Humanists was standing up.

He was supposed to have been unconscious. Even now, he didn’t look like he had regained consciousness.

Although, that was a trivial issue.

What Tatsuya had reacted to was not an outward abnormality.

The expressionless Humanist had both arms outstretched, and a SB — a so-called spirit, was floating over them. No, it was more appropriate to call this ominous purple flame an ‘evil apparition,’ instead of a ‘spirit,’ or so Tatsuya thought.

“Miyuki, stay hidden!”

“Yes!”

Rather than because of Tatsuya's command, Miyuki retreated from the corner of the street because she was frightened of his menacing attitude.

Tatsuya stuck out his opened hand. A violent stream of Psions were released from his palm.

The purple flames that were hovering over the fanatic's hands were erased by the gale of Psions.

Gram Demolition. After being hit by this non-systematic magic that was said to be one of the strongest counter magics, this was the obvious result.

“What!?”

However, a startled cry escaped from Tatsuya's mouth.

That was because the flames of the evil apparition once again flickered on the fanatic's hands.

It was definitely not impossible to reactivate a magic right after the magic sequence has been blown away by Gram Demolition. Gram Demolition simply struck the target with a high-density stream of Psions. Its effect ended as soon as the stream of Psions stopped. The effect of erasing magic did not persist.

However, recreating the magic required early preparation on the part of the caster. No matter how fast the magician was, they couldn't omit the step of building the magic sequence. Even people with 'supernatural abilities' who didn't need an activation sequence couldn't overwrite a phenomenon without a magic sequence.

This process was not detectable within this man.

(This power is not his. A third party is supplying him with SBs) The spirits, no, evil apparitions were being delivered to the young man's hands by a different caster, ignoring the limits of physical distance and moving along the connection formed by 'association.' In short, this meant that the anti-magic faction had become underlings of Ancient Magicians. The person might have had the magic cast upon them without their notice. In fact, the probability of that was high.

Tatsuya once again erased the flames of the evil apparition — rather he didn't actually do that. A person who initiated violence against Magicians because of a

terrorist attack presumed to be carried out by Ancient Magicians was, in fact, under the influence of an Ancient Magician. There was no way that this could be a coincidence. Tatsuya used these flames as a foothold, and focused his “eye” on the real body of the caster.

“A-A Magician!?”

“Leader is... a heretic!?”

Seeing the fireballs floating over the young man’s palms, his comrades groaned with shocked voices.

The flames this time weren’t something that only Tatsuya could see. The SB that had been summoned by — or rather, had been forcefully pushed onto the young man, took the shape of a purple flame. Since the flames were stained with a dark color, it wasn’t possible to see what was happening to the hand underneath. Perhaps, it didn’t just look like a flame, but also possessed the physical properties of it.

“Uh... Uwaaah!”

The young people who were supposed to be his comrades ran away in all directions like a nest of disturbed spiders.

Tatsuya didn’t chase them. Or rather, there was no need to chase them.

At that moment, the purple sphere burst open.

Instead of a large flame, it became compressed into a small fireball and shot out, then it multiplied into around ten fireballs of the same size, which scattered from the young man’s hand.

The fireballs could not penetrate into buildings. Forget the walls, even the purple flames that came into contact with the window glass vanished without leaving a trace.

However, the trees by the roadside that came into contact with the fireballs were charred black and looked like they would break at any time.

No, the word ‘charred’ was probably not the right way to put it.

The parts that were exposed to the purple flames were dried out and became black with decay. The effect wasn’t like applying a high temperature to them,

rather, it was more like their warmth of life was being seeped away.

What would happen if a human came in contact with these flames?

Tatsuya shot down the fireballs that came at him with Gram Demolition—but only the ones that headed directly towards him. He couldn't deny that he had focused too much of his attention on discovering the true identity of the caster, and as a result, he was falling behind in neutralizing the magic.

Looking at the results, the fireballs weren't aimed and fired at a particular target. The fireballs that Tatsuya didn't shoot down passed on either side of him and flew off into the sky. A portion of them also rained down upon the young — comrades — subordinates.

Several of them let out screams in what could be described as agony in death.

Tatsuya didn't turn around, but behind him, there was a mysterious phenomenon of human bodies undergoing localized desiccation. Rather than becoming dried out and mummified, only the portions of the body that were hit by the purple flame appeared to be experiencing rapid aging.

Tatsuya didn't see this condition as it occurred on their bodies, but he recognized that it would be dangerous to ignore this magic. Although he felt that it was a little too late, he cancelled his tracking of the caster and switched his focus to obliterating this magic.

If this magic was being summoned by the leader of the Humanists, then the matter would have been settled simply by knocking him unconscious. However, this young man was just being used as a medium to launch the magic. Besides, it wasn't possible to knock out someone who was already unconscious. The only thing you could do was to kill them.

That might have been the most efficient way to settle the issue. It was possible that the enemy could control the corpse and use it to relay the magic, but Tatsuya's method of killing turned flesh into dust. No corpse was to be left behind.

However, he couldn't use that method now. It would count as excessive self-defense no matter how anyone looked at it, and would only serve to needlessly incite the mass media.

(...The caster who is using the purple flame magic won't be able to send SB's here unless he uses that man to relay it.) If the caster could freely launch fireballs at this location while staying hidden somewhere, he wouldn't go to the trouble of using that young man as a medium. If he made use of other fanatics as well, and created a free-for-all fight, he might have been able to injure Tatsuya.

(There must be some reason why he has to use that man in particular.) —For instance, he might have a sign carved into him that would serve as a marker to turn him into a medium.

Tatsuya thought of this and focused his 'eye.'

(This is in the way.)

Once again, Tatsuya used Gram Demolition to blow away the flames hovering over the young man's hands.

The purple flame SB Magic was reactivated immediately.

(—Found it.)

The seal was carved into the young man's hand. It was a pattern drawn by Psions that pierced the back of his hand and ran onto his palm. Even momentarily extinguishing the flames was enough for Tatsuya to see through the trick behind relaying the magic.

There was a tattoo drawn on the back of the man's hand. A pigment similar to his skin color was used to try to hide it. It had a different pattern from the engraving magic that Tatsuya was familiar with, but it had similar properties that allowed one to produce a magical effect by running Psions through it.

Ancient magic still had the edge when it came to such versatility. While thinking of such pointless things, Tatsuya used 'Decomposition' on a portion of the tattoo.

Some of the pigment was removed from the center of the tattoo, which was so complex that it seemed impossible to have been drawn by hand.

The pigment was separated from the underlying layers of the skin by the use of decomposition magic.

The last two purple fireballs that shot towards him from the front were shot down using Gram Demolition. By distorting the Psion pattern that served as a marker for the magic relay, it became impossible to remotely operate the SB magic.

The tattoo must have also served to remotely control the leader of the Humanists. The man froze like a statue, his body sitting on the ground with his torso erect and both hands sticking forwards, before falling over backwards.

The young man didn't get up. It looked like he was really disabled this time.

Tatsuya waited for ten seconds, then relaxed.

From the corner of the street, the voices of policemen could be heard, yelling, "Nobody move!" Tatsuya, at least, did not think that they were useless for arriving after the matter had been settled.

He looked at the trees on either side and furrowed his eyebrows. He then looked back at the condition of the fanatics, and let out a small sigh.

Tatsuya was honestly glad that the policemen didn't get caught up in the fight. All the policemen stationed in police boxes near the Magic High Schools were magicians who were trained in physical combat, but it was doubtful whether the policemen from the one near the First High School train station could have defended against that SB magic, or neutralized it.

Tatsuya complied with the order to "not move" and stood motionlessly at the same spot. There was no reason to move about now. He didn't need to move his body to follow the trail of data.

He had obtained the necessary information from the tattoo, which had been the enemy magician's magical medium, while he decomposed it.

Tatsuya was now following the enemy's trail in the information dimension.

The effects of the magic had already worn off, but the person who had come into direct contact with the caster and acted as a medium for the magic was lying just a few feet away. In gathering data, there was both temporal proximity, since the magic had been used recently, and spatial proximity, since the medium used to remotely activate the magic was close by. There was also a cause-and-effect relationship formed due to the fact that Tatsuya himself was

the target of the caster's magic.

With so much information to work with, and the fact that information related to the magic was close at hand, it wasn't hard for Tatsuya to track down the owner—in other words, information on the magician.

He was here because he acted on a vague premonition that something bad was drawing closer to Miyuki. It wasn't due to his search for Gu Jie, so finding a clue here was a complete coincidence.

It was because of this that Tatsuya had no intention of letting this chance slip away, even if he had to take some risks for it.

Right now, the search for the terrorist by the Ten Master Clans was at a dead-end. Even the Yotsuba Family were unable to uncover any new clues, so people were now starting to get impatient.

However, it wasn't like Maya was demanding results from him, and Tatsuya himself felt little, rather, no impatience at all. He thought, in private, that it was alright to leave Gu Jie to the police or the Information Division. He also thought that the activities of the anti-magic faction were, to some extent, unavoidable.

It was an irrefutable fact that to non-magicians, magic was as dangerous as a weapon or a bomb. Magicians in their vicinity armed themselves with magic, so it was only natural for unarmed citizens to try and keep them at a distance. Tatsuya felt that this couldn't be helped, and the only option was to give up and accept it. —Until just now.

If an enemy magician was taking advantage of the hatred and fear of the anti-magic faction towards magicians in order to use them as pawns, he couldn't ignore it. Though, perhaps, he hadn't realized that he himself had become a "magician's pawn," but in his case, he was more of a "tool" rather than a "pawn." On the other hand, from the perspective of a hostile observer, there wasn't any real difference between being a "pawn" and "tool."

A wristband with white and red stripes was around the wrist of the Humanist who was used as a magic relay device earlier. It was proof that he was a member of "Egalite," a lower branch of the national anti-magic organization "Blanche" that Tatsuya had a deep history with.

Controlling Blanche from the shadows was Zhou Gongjin, and Gu Jie commanded Zhou Gongjin. Tatsuya had heard this from various sources.

Looking at the chain of command, the members of Egalite had been pawns of Gu Jie from the start. However, it seemed that the closer one got to the top, the more they resonated with the ideologies of humanism — or perhaps, brainwashed — and were included in the organization.

This leader didn't look like he was acting when he shouted about the creed of humanism, either.

As expected, they were being duped. The tattoo used to relay the evil apparitions was probably placed on him without his knowledge.

It would be dangerous if people armed with guns and magic infiltrated unarmed groups of demonstrators again and attacked Miyuki, like what happened just now. That was what Tatsuya was worried about. If he could constantly stay by Miyuki's side, there would be nothing to fear, but until he captured Gu Jie, he couldn't do that. Due to the mission, there would be times when he would have no choice but to work away from her.

In order to carry out his mission of exterminating the terrorist, he had no choice but to feel the fear of exposing the one he loved to acts of terrorism. It wasn't just limited to terrorists. Even if his opponent was a criminal organization, or on a larger scale, a civil war, or even an international war, it would result in the same sense of irony. The only difference between war and terrorism was whether or not direct attacks on noncombatants were permitted. Perhaps, it was right to say that war and terrorism meant different things only in the modern times because some people differentiated between combatants and noncombatants. Although, it was a different matter whether or not that rule was always followed.

Still, Tatsuya didn't have the option of stopping his search for Gu Jie.

Even if he withdrew here, Miyuki's safety wouldn't be assured. In the end, the only option that he had was to find Gu Jie as soon as possible and suppress him. There was no other way.

He divided his consciousness into two parts, and sent one half into the large ocean of information. The other half was on the lookout for anyone who might

attempt to harm Miyuki, as the other followed the trail of the magician, who had used the purple flame magic.

Information was always attached to an event. If something underwent a change, there would always be traces of information left behind to indicate the “event of a change.” This didn’t change, even if magic, a “technique to manipulate information,” was used. Even information manipulation designed to wipe out the information would leave traces of its own. Even if they tried to paint over the fact that “SB was used,” even if they used ink of the same colors as the background to overwrite the black ink, the unnatural shade of color would remain behind. In addition, although faint, it would not disappear and could still serve as information about the event.

(...There.)

Information about the magician floated up into Tatsuya’s field of vision.

(It isn’t Gu Jie, but...)

The information that Tatsuya perceived was unfortunately not that of Gu Jie, whom he had encountered in Zama. If the person he had encountered after tracking the information had been Gu Jie, he could have just used Mist Dispersion from here and the matter would be settled. If he could only ‘see’ him clearly, physical distance was of no consequence.

(At this level of clarity, maybe I could gain some detailed information on his location as well?)

One after the other, Tatsuya “read” the information about the magician at the distance. His name was Oumi Kazukiyo, his pseudonym as a magician was “Dollmaker,” and his current location was in Kamakura at...

(Tch!)

All of a sudden, a drastic change was introduced to the information that he was observing. In order to avoid damage from that backlash, he reflexively cut off the connection. Tatsuya’s vision returned to what was observed through his normal sight. The distance between him and the oncoming police had barely changed since he shifted his perception to the information dimension. Less than one second had passed.

(In other words, he killed him as soon as I destroyed his magic.) The change in information was a transition from the state of being alive to death. Tatsuya had began to track down the information a little over ten seconds after destroying the purple flame magic. This was just about the amount of time it would take for a person near the magician to realize what had happened. It was a coincidence that he had been killed while being observed by Tatsuya, but the killing itself might have been premeditated. One of the reasons he could think of for the falling out was that the enemy knew he had the means to track down information, or that they had inferred as much.

“He’s a troublesome opponent...”

Tatsuya let out a sigh as he raised his hands and showed a posture of submission to the approaching police.

Perhaps he could no longer afford to nitpick over his methods.

That’s what Tatsuya thought.



In Oumi Kazukiyo’s mansion, Gu Jie finally began to reflect upon the fact that he was running out of time as he gazed upon the corpse of the owner of the house whom he had just killed.

The reason why Gu Jie killed his friend, an Ancient Magician, was because he had sensed a retaliatory technique. It didn’t fit into any category of magic that he knew of, but he sensed the intent of someone backtracking along the trail of the SB Magic that had been used and was approaching at a frightening speed.

Almost reflexively, Gu Jie had killed Oumi, and thereby cut-off the trail of magic. However, he wasn’t confident that he had managed to entirely block off the enemy’s technique. Even though the risk of being exposed to counter-magic was abated, Gu Jie thought that there was a possibility that his location had been revealed.

He had sensed Tatsuya’s “gaze,” but Gu Jie didn’t know that it was an ability capable only of seeing, not attacking. However, after spending nearly fifty years living a life on the run and conducting his secret feud, Gu Jie was immediately able to detect that momentary observation in the information dimension. —It

was hostility directed towards him.

“I had originally hoped for one more day and night, but...”

Gu Jie murmured as he gazed towards the next room where two human bodies laid. One of these bodies had more potential than any other body he had handled before. It was enough to make Gu Jie feel that it was a waste to use it as a disposable pawn. If he had just one more day, he wouldn't have had to turn it into a soldier of death — not a soldier who was prepared to die — a literal undead soldier. Instead, he could have turned it into long-lasting Generator.

“It's a waste... though being too greedy is foolish as well.”

Gu Jie shook his head as if to dispel any lingering regrets, then moved towards the next room while holding the elaborately decorated dagger, which he had used to take the life of his old friend, the Ancient Magician, Oumi Kazukiyo.



(My own vanity will probably end up destroying me someday...) Izumi put on a depressed expression to hide her bitter thoughts from the adults before her. She was actually depressed, so it wasn't that hard to put on an act.

“...So, apart from Sakurai-san, who used barrier magic to shut out the violence, no other magic was used?”

“Yes.”

Izumi returned a short affirmative to the question raised by the teacher in-charge of her class, Class-1B.

“Is it true that the opponents used Cast Jamming?”

This question was put forward by the Vice-Principal, Yaosaka.

“Yes.”

Izumi once again answered succinctly, but, even for her, it wasn't easy to deal with four teachers including the Principal and Vice-Principal by herself.

Why did she have to go through something so bothersome? Such resentful thoughts ran through Izumi's mind. However, Izumi herself was responsible for being in this situation. Since she was aware of that fact, her anger and irritation

continued to smolder under her skin without the flames getting bigger.

Female students from her school had been harassed by a group of young men. Besides, there was a chance that it might have escalated enough to cause injuries, so it wasn't strange that the matter didn't stop at the Vice-principal, and that even the Principal got involved. It was also reasonable that she was being questioned regarding the incident because she was involved in it.

The problem was, why was she being made to do this alone?

No, even Izumi knew why this was the logical conclusion, and that her current situation was unavoidable.

The opponents were armed with Antinite, a precious military resource.

Not only that, they also tried to use a gun meant for assassinations.

In the end, the ruffians, who were supposed to be anti-magic supporters, used magic to cause damage to both people and property. The police wouldn't be able to write this issue off with a simple interview at the police box, either. Not only were the assailants being taken to the Hachioji police station, even Izumi and the others, who were the victims, had been asked to go there as well.

Since it was such a serious situation, someone had to immediately inform the school, too. In other words, someone had to return to the school.

Minami had been asked to come by the police since she was the person who used the barrier magic. Tatsuya couldn't refuse to participate as he had used violence, even though it was in self-defense. As for Miyuki, she didn't really use magic, but the large amount of Psions she had released were detected by the sensors.

In the process of elimination, Izumi was the only person left to go back to school to report about the incident. From a logical perspective, Izumi understood this as well. However, as the saying went, "Logic and feelings are different things."

"Saegusa-kun."

Principal Momoyama, who had been silent until now, spoke up.

"Yes."

Izumi looked at the principal and answered nervously.

“Is it true that the thugs changed their targets to you and Shiba-kun after recognizing both of you?”

While being apprehensive of Momoyama’s sharp gaze, Izumi replied in an unwavering tone.

“I am sure of it, Principal. They looked at me and called me ‘a member of the Saegusa Family’, then, after looking at President Shiba, they said, ‘First High’s Student Council President’. They confirmed this among themselves before approaching us.”

“Which would mean that your group had a higher priority to them, compared to the other first years from our school who were being harassed.”

“I think so, as well.”

Momoyama replied, “Fumu...”, and drifted into thought while folding his hands inside the sleeves of his Japanese-style clothes.

Izumi patiently waited for him to resume speaking. The ones who were unable to withstand the pressure of the silence were the other adults.

“Principal.”

Vice-Principal Yaosaka spoke to Momoyama in a reserved, or rather, frightened tone.

Momoyama looked at Yaosaka without giving any indication that he was annoyed at the interruption of his thoughts.

“Vice-Principal. The school will be temporarily closed starting tomorrow. For now, the period of closure will be until Saturday, the 23rd.”

“Principal, temporarily closing the school on such short notice...”

Yaosaka unintentionally retorted at the Principal’s sudden decision. He immediately shut his mouth and put on a chastised expression, but the scolding he expected from Momoyama did not come.

“Do you need a reason?”

“Ah, yes, about that...”

Instead, Yaosaka was directed with a gaze filled with contempt that seemed to say, “Can’t you understand even this much?”

“If our students were being attacked at random, that would have been just some discontented elements going on rampage.”

Even so, Momoyama gave an explanation. Maybe it was because he was a teacher, but he liked to explain things.

“However, it appears that our students are being assigned priorities, and are being targeted based on that. Rather than a spontaneous outburst, there is a high probability that this is an organized and planned crime.”

“Organized crime, you say...”

Yaosaka wasn’t the only one who went pale. The class adviser of Class-1B, the teacher in-charge of all first-year students, the other adults who had gathered around the Principal’s desk, and even Izumi, went pale in the face.

“Unlike ordinary rioting, there is a chance that their methods might get more radical. We need to wait out and observe the situation for a while.”

“Yes... I agree with you completely.”

“I’ll leave the formalities to you.”

After giving Yaosaka that order, Momoyama once again looked at Izumi.

“Saegusa-kun, thank you for attending.”

Although there was no hint of gratitude in his voice, Izumi took this to mean that she was being dismissed.

“No, I only did what was natural.”

Izumi wanted to leave this place as soon as possible, so she didn’t let this chance pass.

“In that case, please excuse me, Principal.”

She gave a courteous bow and turned towards the exit.



After completing the interviews at the police station, it was already past 7:00

P.M. by the time that Tatsuya and the others reached home. Due to what had just happened earlier, the police escorted them home in an unmarked police car. A motorcycle police officer from the Traffic Division had driven Tatsuya's bike to their house. The police appeared to have noticed that the cowl and tires of the bike were bulletproof, but they didn't say anything. It was probably because they knew about his parentage.

The personal items belonging to Miyuki and Minami were still in their lockers at school. However, there was nothing among them that would melt or spoil, so they decided to retrieve them tomorrow and planned to stay at home for the rest of the day. This meant that the long-awaited information regarding Gu Jie that was obtained from data tracking would go to waste, but Tatsuya had an idea on what to do about that.

In any case, both Tatsuya and Miyuki intended to completely relax at their own home, but a mail arrived hardly ten minutes after they took off their shoes at the front door.

Tatsuya had promptly changed into casual clothes from his riding jacket and trousers that doubled as fighting togs. He then sat on the sofa in the living room, and looked at the fully unfolded screen of the mobile terminal with a frown on his face. At this time, Miyuki who had taken a little longer to get changed, came down the stairs.

"...Onii-sama, is something the matter? You have a troubled expression on your face."

"No, it's nothing like that."

Tatsuya raised his head and responded to Miyuki, then indicated the space next to him with his eyes.

Miyuki sat down next to him as invited, and looked at the screen of the terminal that Tatsuya turned towards her.

"Tatsuya-sama, Miyuki-sama, the tea is ready."

Minami brought out the tea while wearing an apron over her uniform. As Tatsuya had requested, the tray held strongly-brewed Sencha. Minami placed the teacups on the table and looked inquisitively at Tatsuya to see if he had any

other request.

“Please wait a little.”

After saying that to Minami, Tatsuya looked at Miyuki.

Miyuki had just finished reading the mail that wasn't very long, and lifted her head.

“Onii-sama, this is... we can't reject it, right?”

“You're right.”

Tatsuya let out a small sigh and looked at Minami, who was awaiting his orders.

“After we finish drinking our tea, Miyuki and I will be going out. We'll be eating outside, so you can do as you wish, Minami. Feel free to go to sleep early.”

Miyuki must have felt that her brother's explanation was unsatisfactory.

“We've been invited by the new Head of the Juumonji Family. I think we'll be a little late in returning home.”

She gave an additional explanation before Minami could react to Tatsuya's order.

“Understood.”

Of course, Minami's answer wouldn't have changed, whether or not she had received a detailed explanation. She gave a respectful bow to the siblings, who were her masters.



Although Miyuki had told Minami that they “had been invited by the Head of the Juumonji Family,” that hadn't been the full story. As Tatsuya arrived along with Miyuki, it was not only Katsuto, but also Mayumi and Masaki, who were waiting.

The place was the restaurant that they always used for meetings. From the outside, it looked like a slightly larger detached residence, but after entering it, even Miyuki was slightly taken by surprise.

Tatsuya had already explained the reason why he didn't attend today's meeting to Katsuto. The time was already past 2200. Usually, by this time, they would be finishing their meal after the meeting.

However, they had still been summoned here. Katsuto, Mayumi, and Masaki greeted them with serious looks on their faces.

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

"Sorry for asking you to come on short notice. Please, take a seat."

In contrast to Tatsuya's genteel apology, Katsuto responded in a tone that indicated that he truly felt guilty, and urged Tatsuya and Miyuki to take a seat.

Katsuto and the others, who had been waiting for Tatsuya and Miyuki, were already sitting at the table. Katsuto was sitting at the end of the table in the host's seat, and Mayumi and Masaki were on either side of him. Although this was a French restaurant, was the table set in the British-American style to say that they need not be concerned about intricate table manners? Or perhaps, they never cared about such things in the first place. Tatsuya decided that it was the latter, and made Miyuki sit in front of Mayumi, while he sat in front of Masaki.

"Shiba-san, are you alright?"

As soon as she had taken a seat, Masaki asked Miyuki if she had been injured.

"Yes. At the end of the day, there was no real damage. Thank you for worrying about me."

Miyuki gave her answer, and smiled sweetly at Masaki. Masaki went red in the face, and relaxed with an expression of relief.

It appeared that Masaki was really worried about Miyuki. Both Katsuto and Mayumi understood that, and didn't berate Masaki for his rashness.

"Shiba, it seems you've had a rough day."

Instead of reprimanding Masaki for his behavior, Katsuto spoke to Tatsuya.

"Yes, I did. It was outside of my expectations."

Tatsuya didn't act tough, and instead, honestly admitted that his expectations

were naive.

“The assailant didn’t just have a gun, but he also used magic, didn’t he?”

After Mayumi asked this with a worried expression on her face...

“An anti-magic supporter used magic? Or did an enemy magician infiltrate the Humanists’ group?”

Masaki came out with a straight question.

Instead of answering Masaki directly, Tatsuya phrased his words in the form of a report to Katsuto.

“The one who was used as a relay for magic was a member of ‘Egalite,’ a sub-branch of ‘Blanche’.”

“Blanche?”

Katsuto’s raised eyebrows indicated his surprise.

“Wasn’t that organization eradicated from Japan?”

“The remnants must have burrowed underground.”

At Tatsuya’s reply, Katsuto replied, “Fumu...” and folded his arms. His bearing indicated that he wasn’t convinced. After the “Blanche incident,” the Juumonji Family had also participated in the cleanup.

Katsuto must have been under the impression that they had completely neutralized Blanche and Egalite.

“Tatsuya-kun, what do you mean by ‘relay’?”

Although Mayumi was also involved in the incident that took place in First High during April of the year before last, she showed interest in a different matter.

“The member of Egalite, who was leading the group that was harassing the First High students, was not a magician. An Ancient Magician was using him as a relay, or in their terms, a ‘familiar,’ and was controlling the magic remotely.”

“They can do something like that?”

Mayumi appeared to be genuinely surprised. The technique of setting up a

relay and controlling magic remotely was not unique to ancient magic, but it was scarcely used in modern magic. It wasn't surprising that she didn't know about it.

"I'll skip the detailed explanation, but the basic method was to put a magical marker on the relay and invoke the magic from there. It doesn't have to be by means of projectiles, heat, or sound. There are other methods available. In this case, an SB was activated from the relay, and used to perform an indiscriminate attack."

"So the enemy was an Ancient Magician? Do you know their identity?"

As Mayumi was saying 'hee...' while sounding impressed, beside her, Masaki asked this question.

Although he didn't say it aloud, Tatsuya thought that this was the most pertinent question.

"I took a recording of the technique. I'm having it investigated right now."

For now, Tatsuya covered up the issue with that answer. Although, saying that it was under investigation was the truth. While he did have a name and an address, those alone weren't of any use since they didn't belong to Gu Jie.

What kind of background did the Ancient Magician named Oumi Kazukiyo have? Who was he acquainted with within the country, and what places did he visit? What organization did he belong to? They still didn't have any information that would help them find out Gu Jie's whereabouts.

Besides, while Gu Jie must have left Oumi's residence already, he might have left some items behind that had some connection to him. Hoping that it was the case, he had asked Ayako and Yuuka to investigate the matter. The reason why he had called Yuuka was because he felt that the Tsukuba Family, who were skilled in Mental Interference magic, were better equipped to track down the enemy than the Kuroba Family for this case.

"A recording of the technique? Just how did you do that..."

The CAD's activation sequence program was a blueprint of the magic sequence that was been stored in a digitized form. Recording the magic sequence was a technique that was currently being used, so it was definitely

not impossible. However, that technique only assembled a magic sequence that would bring about the desired change and recorded it. Observing, analyzing and recording the magic sequence of another person as data in the middle of combat exceeded the current limits of Magic Engineering. It was natural that Masaki had his doubts regarding that matter.

“...No, that was insensitive of me. My apologies.”

However, Masaki didn't wait for Tatsuya's response, and instead apologized to him while bowing his head. In the magical community, prying into the nature of magic used by others was considered rude.

Masaki realized that his question went against this principle before any of the other attendees could point this out.

“That's okay. However, I would appreciate it if you could keep this matter a secret.”

“Of course. So, Shiba, when will the results of the investigation be available?”

Tatsuya accepted the apology with a smile, and Katsuto turned the conversation back to the main topic.

Tatsuya stopped smiling and turned towards Katsuto.

“I think it will take all of tomorrow. I will let you know as soon as we find any leads, senpai. Of course, Ichijou, as well.”

“Understood. I'll leave that to the Yotsuba Family.”

Neither Mayumi nor Masaki objected to Katsuto's statement.

Instead, Mayumi exchanged a glance with Katsuto, and turned towards Miyuki.

“Miyuki-san, you've had a terrible day, right? I'm glad that you weren't injured.”

“Thank you for your concern.”

Miyuki slightly bowed her head and waited for the next words.

Of course, what Mayumi really wanted to talk about was something else.

“I heard the story from my sister, and it seems that the people from the anti-

magic faction were aiming for Miyuki-san?”

By sister, she must have meant Izumi. Since there seemed to be a miscommunication, Miyuki inserted a correction.

“Actually, they were originally harassing a different group of students, and came our way after noticing us.”

“So, Miyuki-san, they knew about you, after all.”

What Mayumi was probably trying to say was, “Did they know Miyuki was going to be the next Head of the Yotsuba Family?”

Miyuki refuted that in a roundabout manner.

“It seemed that they knew that I was the Student Council President of First High.”

In terms of people who were connected with the Ten Master Clans, Izumi was actually the one who was tentatively identified by the mob as a direct descendant of the Saegusa Family, but Miyuki didn’t talk about that.

“In any case, were the Humanists insolent enough to set their eyes on Shiba-san?”

Masaki asked from beside Mayumi.

“We think so.”

Mayumi instantly replied as if seeking to prevent Tatsuya and Miyuki from disagreeing.

“That’s why, would you let us assign an escort to you, Miyuki-san?”

Mayumi’s proposal caused Miyuki to be perplexed.

“An escort? But I already have...”

Miyuki was about to say, “I already have Onii-sama,” but realized that those words wouldn’t be accepted due to the current situation.

Currently, Tatsuya was returning from school separately from Miyuki due to the search for Gu Jie. Although they were physically apart, Tatsuya always kept an “eye” on Miyuki, and eliminated any danger in her vicinity. However, this was a secret pertaining to Tatsuya’s strength, and could not be explained to

people from other families.

Mayumi and the others probably wouldn't be convinced, unless she explained Tatsuya's abilities in detail. Especially since just today, he had rushed to save Miyuki.

"You mean, you want to assign someone to capture the people who might come to assault Miyuki?"

As Miyuki was struggling to give an answer, Tatsuya came to her rescue by speaking in a voice filled with displeasure.

Tatsuya looked at Katsuto and Mayumi, and fixed his sight on Masaki.

"Ichijou. Do you intend to use Miyuki as bait?"

"No!"

Masaki replied in an extremely agitated voice.

"I won't let them do that! I will act as the bait instead!"

There wasn't a hint of deception in Masaki's words, but Tatsuya continued to look at him with a narrow gaze.

"So, you won't deny that there is a plan to lure the enemy out?"

Masaki made a 'oh, crap!' expression and closed his mouth.

"This must be Kichijouji's idea."

Since Tatsuya hit the bullseye, Masaki wasn't able to say anything back.



“Yes, Ichijou did put forward an idea wherein he would act as a bait.”

In the middle of the uncomfortable atmosphere, Katsuto began to arbitrate.

“Regarding the issue of assigning an escort to the next Head of the Yotsuba, I will not deny that there was a plan to capture a group of terrorists and use them to gain a clue about the hideout of the mastermind, Gu Jie.”

Needless to say, the “Next Head of the Yotsuba” that Katsuto was talking about was referring to Miyuki. He admitted that Tatsuya’s criticism was not unwarranted.

“However, that is not the main reason. The escort’s main task is to act as the next head’s protector. Shiba, this is something that Saegusa came up with so that you could focus on your search.”

Tatsuya shifted his gaze from Katsuto to Mayumi.

Mayumi put strength into her eyes and received Tatsuya’s gaze.

“...Understood.”

Saying so, Tatsuya softened his gaze.

“However, we will have to decline. The Yotsuba Family will assign an escort.”

However, his tone of voice completely rejected Mayumi’s offer.

Considering her personality, she probably wanted to assign an escort to Miyuki purely out of goodwill. However, the person who would actually assign the escort was her father. There was no way that it would be limited to just bodyguard duties.

“I see... Considering Miyuki-san’s position, I suppose that is only natural.”

“Not at all. It’s the thought that counts.”

Miyuki gave Mayumi a courteous bow.

As Mayumi shook her head while laughing, this discussion came to a close.

“Juumonji-senpai.”

As Miyuki and Mayumi looked at each other, Tatsuya spoke to Juumonji past their gazes.

In response to Tatsuya’s voice, Katsuto looked at him.

“I am the person who actually caused harm to the Anti-magic faction. If you need someone to act as bait, am I not the best choice?”

The person who objected to Tatsuya’s words was not Katsuto, but Mayumi.

“No hyena would willingly rush towards a lion, unless it was being chased by the lion and had no choice but to fight back.”

“It could also happen if they were both fighting over the same prey.”

Mayumi looked intently at Katsuto, who had casually made such a comment.

“Juumonji-kun. Don’t tell me, are you really planning on using Miyuki-san as ‘bait’?”

“Saegusa, don’t talk like this doesn’t concern you. It’s not just the next Head of the Yotsuba, but as the eldest daughter of the Saegusa Family, there is a good chance that you might be targeted by the Anti-magic faction as well.”

Caught by surprise, Mayumi blinked at him.

“Regarding the incident today,”

To fill the gap in the conversation while Mayumi was at a loss for words, Miyuki began to speak.

“I was not the only one who was targeted by the Humanists. I definitely heard them say ‘belonging to the Saegusa Family’ after seeing Izumi-chan.”

Miyuki didn’t particularly wait for a situation where her words would have the most impact, but she didn’t waste the unexpected opportunity that came her way.

Katsuto’s, Tatsuya’s, and Masaki’s gazes gathered on Mayumi.

“...Eh, me?”

Mayumi pointed at herself with a flustered expression.

“Saegusa. What about your escort?”

“I’ll be fine. I can look after myself, after all.”

Katsuto repeatedly shook his head sideways.

“I think the issue of Saegusa-senpai’s escort is what actually needs to be reviewed.”

“Indeed.”

At Tatsuya’s comment, Katsuto, as expected, moved his head repeatedly, this time in a nod.

“Hey, didn’t I say that I would be fine?”

“I don’t intend to doubt your skills, Saegusa, but this is just in case.”

“It’s not like I’m walking around completely unprotected!”

“Is that so? I don’t recall seeing anyone like that on campus...”

“There’s no way I would bring a bunch of unrelated people into the campus!”

It appeared that they would be able to avoid having an escort from the Saegusa Family assigned to Miyuki. Tatsuya and Miyuki thought that as they watched Mayumi and Katsuto arguing.



As Tatsuya and the others finished their meeting and moved on to dinner, Kokonoe Yakumo was entertaining an unexpected visitor.

At the back of the temple, Yakumo was wearing a monk’s stole, which was unusual, and was sitting in a respectful manner. Although he called himself a hermit, he could not ignore the customs when meeting with this person.

The guest had a strange air about him. His muscle mass may have reduced due to age, but he was broad-shouldered. Even while sitting, it could be inferred that he must have had a magnificent body in his youth.

His head was clean shaven like that of a monk’s. However, he was wearing an obviously expensive-looking suit. It looked very natural on him. He didn’t look like someone who was just used to having expensive things. Instead, he gave off the feeling of materialistic power that his expensive bespoke suit symbolized.

He had thick, grey eyebrows and large, round eyes. While his features couldn’t be called handsome, his face had a dignified look. However, his cloudy white left eye gave off a strange sense of pressure to people who faced him. The strange impression he gave off was, undoubtedly, mostly due to this eye.

“For Your Excellency, Priest Aoba, to visit a nameless temple like this, whatever could be the reason?”

Yakumo served the guest a cup of carelessly-made tea.

The monk, who was wearing a suit, casually picked up the tea cup, took a large gulp and returned the cup to the tatami mat. It was a way of drinking that wholly ignored propriety, but strangely did not appear to be rude.

“Nameless temple? Being too modest makes you sound sarcastic, Kokonoe Yakumo.”

“My apologies.”

As Yakumo answered in an aloof manner, the elderly person called “His Excellency, Priest Aoba,” scrutinized him with his right eye.

“Besides, there’s no way a lowly chief priest of a nameless temple could talk to me, Toudou Aoba, in such a rude manner.”

“Oh, did I hurt your feelings?”

“No. In fact, it makes me feel more comfortable.”

This time, Elder Toudou drained the remaining tea that Yakumo had prepared in one gulp.

“I request a refill.”

Yakumo gave a faint smile, bowed, and received the cup.

Yakumo poured the water that he had boiled on the portable stove — this back room used a portable stove even in mid-winter, despite having a fireplace — into the teacup, picked up the tea whisk, and asked in a carefree manner.

“So, Your Excellency, what brings you here today?”

Yakumo stirred the mixture of matcha and hot water, removed the tea whisk, then pushed the tea cup towards Elder Toudou instead of presenting it to him, before raising his head.

“You just visited us last month, so it can’t be that you wanted to see the face of this humble priest once again.”

The ‘last month’ that Yakumo was talking about was regarding the fourth of January, when Tatsuya and Miyuki had come to give their New Year’s greetings. The person who had arrived without notice and spoke to Yakumo before them was this elderly monk.

“Kokonoe Yakumo, I wish to borrow your strength.”

Elder Toudou’s answer to Yakumo’s question was very direct.

“Well, I am merely a monk who is lacking strength, so will I be able to help Your Excellency?”

“Enough of the humility. You are praised as the reincarnation of Kashin Koji

due to your illusionary techniques, so if you are lacking strength, then there are no strong practitioners in this world.”

“Well, now. Kashin Koji was rumored to be a simple conjurer. If that is the case, perhaps that gossip about me being ‘Kashin Koji’s reincarnation’ meant that my techniques were no more than a sleight of hand?”

“Isn’t that a belief from when magic was considered to be a pipe dream? Such deception won’t work on me. I am well-aware of your true ability.”

After hearing that declaration of confidence in a tone of voice that indicated that it was taken for granted, Yakumo scratched his head.

“...So, Your Excellency. What do you require of me?”

To begin with, Yakumo didn’t think that he could deceive Elder Toudou.

Yakumo was well aware of just who this elderly man with a cloudy white eye was.

“The unrestrained activities of the necromancer from the continent, Gu Jie, are inexcusable. The technique that uses corpses as puppets spreads enough impurity as it is. If he uses it indiscriminately like that, it will be too late to exorcise.”

“Your Excellency. There’s no point in talking about Shinto rituals to a Buddhist monk like myself.”

“I won’t ask you to participate in the exorcism. I just want your help in removing the source of the impurity.”

“So, you want me to exterminate the necromancer known as Gu Jie?”

Yakumo’s sigh was not a pretense.

“It is enough that you remove him from Japan. I don’t care if he is dead or alive.”

“It seems that your subordinates don’t feel that it is okay to let him escape, Your Excellency.”

“The people of the Yotsuba are no longer my subordinates. Now, I am merely a sponsor.”

Yakumo did not take Elder Toudou's words seriously. It was true that this old man was once the owner of the Fourth Institute, and was now a sponsor of the Yotsuba Family, but the word 'merely' was false.

Yakumo was also aware that it wasn't just the Yotsuba Family that he was sponsoring.

"If I dip my hands in such worldly issues, the main temple will get noisy."

This was not an excuse. It was a pretty shameful thing for Yakumo, but it was the truth.

Of course, there was no point in complaining to Toudou Aoba about such a thing.

"I have already talked to Mt. Hiei regarding this."

This old man already had enough influence in the shadows to easily overturn something like that.

"Is that so..."

Although it was rare for Yakumo, he felt like there was nothing he could do but sigh.

"Despite what I said, I don't intend to ask you for a very big favor. I am not in a position to do so, after all."

"To begin with, please tell me what it is you wish of me in more detail. I will let you know if I can accept the job after that."

Yakumo was the only person who could give such a reply. For example, even though Kudou Retsu was older than Elder Toudou, he would not be able to decline his 'request'.

"I want you to help Shiba Tatsuya."

"...You are worried about him, as well, Your Excellency?"

"Although he was an accidental creation, he is still one of the extreme cases. I need him to remain useful for a while yet."

Yakumo felt sympathy for Tatsuya. He knew that what Elder Toudou meant by 'useful' was that he wanted Tatsuya to act as a lab rat in gathering more data.

Toudou Aoba had a long reach. Yakumo thought that it would be considerably difficult for Tatsuya to escape from his clutches.

However, Yakumo did not think that Tatsuya would have any trouble with the circumstances he was currently facing.

“I don’t think someone like Gu Jie could do anything to him.”

“I am not worried about Shiba Tatsuya fighting against Gu Jie.”

“In that case, are you worried about a possibility of clashing with the STARS?”

Yakumo was aware that one of the leaders of the STARS, the magician corps under the direct command of the USNA Joint Chiefs of Staff, had secretly entered Japan, and he also knew about his objectives. Although he didn’t know the motives behind it, he was aware that the USNA military wanted to assassinate Gu Jie with their own hands. The USNA military was trying to prevent Gu Jie from falling into the hands of the Japanese authorities. There were probably some shady circumstances that they didn’t want Japan to find out about.

If Tatsuya drove Gu Jie into a corner, it was easy to predict that the STARS would once again get in his way. Even so, Yakumo didn’t believe that it would become a situation where his help would be absolutely necessary.

“If we’re talking about pure combat ability, I don’t think even the second strongest member of STARS, Benjamin ‘Canopus’ Loews, could win against Shiba Tatsuya.”

“Yes, if it were just a fight to the death with no rules.”

“I see.”

Yakumo understood what Elder Toudou was worried about. What he was afraid of, was going against the ‘rules.’ Toudou Aoba was trying to prevent Yotsuba’s ‘creation’ from getting dragged into a decisive fight by means outside of violence.

“What I want to ask of you, is to hold on to his reins, and prevent him from falling into an unfavorable situation.”

“What about searching for Gu Jie?”

“If you are able to dispose of him, then that would be great, but that is of lower importance. In any case, even if we leave him alone, the STARS will get rid of him.”

Basically, it was okay, even if Gu Jie was assassinated by the STARS.

This meant that there was no need to worry about the honor of the Ten Master Clans. From Elder Toudou’s perspective, it was probably better if the Ten Master Clans were driven into a slightly difficult position.

“If that is the case, then I will accept your request. Shiba Tatsuya isn’t a stranger to me, after all.”

“My thanks. Is ten cushions sufficient as your payment?”

The ‘cushion’ mentioned here is a code word from back when deals were often settled with paper money. One ‘cushion’ meant 10,000 notes, with each note being worth 10,000 Yen, so basically, it was one hundred million Yen. Ten cushions would be equal to one billion Yen.

Yakumo gave a bitter smile and shook his head at Elder Toudou’s proposal.

“No, no. Despite appearances, I consider myself a hermit. There is no need for monetary compensation.”

This time, Elder Toudou shook his head with a serious face.

“The truth is, there is nothing more valuable. At the very least, this is what I think. If you cannot accept cash, then I’ll find a statue of Buddha from somewhere and deliver it to you.”

Incidentally, the statue of Buddha that Toudou Aoba would send would be made of pure gold.

“Please, don’t send anything that would be difficult to dispose of.”

“Something that you would find difficult to dispose of? Although that would be interesting to see, I doubt that could happen.”

Elder Toudou stood up by putting a hand on his knee. It was an action befitting his age.

A second later, Yakumo stood up without a sound.

“The tea was horrible as usual, but thanks, anyways.”

Yakumo smiled at Elder Toudou’s usual phrase and opened the sliding door.

Chapter 12

It was 10 P.M. by the time Tatsuya and Miyuki arrived home after their dinner with Katsuto, Mayumi, and Masaki.

Although it wasn't a particularly late hour for a high schooler, Minami was still awake to welcome them.

"Welcome back."

Minami wore her maid uniform to greet Tatsuya and Miyuki at the front door.

"We're back. Did any news come in?"

Minami hesitated for a moment at Tatsuya's query.

"There were no calls from the Main House, Kuroba-sama, or Tsukuba-sama."

Tatsuya was waiting for them to contact him about the results of the investigation on the magician that he had tracked down. However, there was a hint of another matter from Minami's tone.

"I'll listen to you in the living room."

"Understood."

Tatsuya, Miyuki and Minami entered the living room. Tatsuya and Miyuki sat down on the sofa while Minami stood to deliver the news of the event that transpired while they were gone.

"There was an emergency message from First High."

"Emergency message?"

"Yes, Miyuki-sama. Although the contents are not very pressing, it had to be sent before the end of the day so it was marked as 'urgent'."

"So, what's the announcement?"

"The school will be closed until Saturday, the 23rd, although the closure might be extended."

Once Tatsuya's query was answered, the siblings were visibly surprised.

"...That's quite sudden."

“...After the incident at Second High, such an incident took place here today. It’s understandable for the school to take these measures.”

Tatsuya felt the same as Miyuki. So, he made up a somewhat plausible reason and settled on that.

“I see... Still, this is troublesome.”

Miyuki put her hand on her cheek and sighed softly.

“How so?”

At Tatsuya's inquiry, Miyuki subtly averted her gaze in a slightly embarrassed manner.

“Due to the riot that happened after school, I headed back home directly from the police station... and left some personal items in my school locker.”

Tatsuya had judged based on Miyuki’s expression that the personal item was something that she didn’t want anyone else to see.

“Shall we get it tomorrow then?”

Miyuki looked at Tatsuya with a surprised expression.

“But, Onii-sama, isn’t the school going to be closed?”

“It’s just to get some personal items. If we really can’t get in, it should be fine for us to leave it then, right?”

Miyuki didn’t say it isn’t something that important.

“I... see.”

Miyuki was undeniably concerned. However, she decided to take Tatsuya’s offer to accompany her instead.

Tatsuya didn’t go out again that night. He knew where the remote attack that used SBs originated from. Going to the scene was an option, but Tatsuya decided to use another method.

“Miyuki, do you have some time?”

As the hour approached midnight, when it was time to go to sleep, Tatsuya

knocked on Miyuki's door.

"Ah, yes. Please wait a moment."

He received a flustered response from the other side of the door. He sensed someone moving around in a hurried manner, and Miyuki showed her face before long.

"Please come in, Onii-sama."

Miyuki was slightly flushed. Probably because she found her attire, which was just a housecoat over her negligee, to be embarrassing.

However, she hadn't closed the front of her housecoat. It wasn't because she didn't have the time.

Tatsuya candidly walked into the room with Miyuki's invitation, even though she was only in her nightclothes.

"Please take a seat wherever you'd like."

"No, I'm fine here."

However, Tatsuya stopped just inside the entrance and didn't move further inside.

"Onii-sama?"

"Miyuki, I know this will sound strange, but..."

"Yes?"

Miyuki tilted her head at Tatsuya's unexpectedly roundabout way of talking.

"Can you wake up early tomorrow?"

Why was he struggling so much to say just that...? While wondering about that, Miyuki naturally answered, "Yes".

"Yes, I don't mind. But at what time exactly would you like me to wake up?"

Tatsuya's answer went beyond her expectations.

"I'd like you to come to the underground laboratory around 4:00 AM."

"...That's pretty early."

“Ah, I’m sorry...”

“No, I don’t mind at all!”

Due to her surprise, she unintentionally gave a straightforward response to Tatsuya, but she immediately took back her words that could be taken as dissatisfaction. Since she was worried about appearing as if she was unhappy with Tatsuya, she spoke louder than necessary.

“I see.”

Tatsuya was slightly surprised at her excited reply, but his expression soon returned to one that concealed his hesitation.

“Onii-sama, there’s something else you want to talk about, right? Please, go ahead.”

As she moved closer and questioned him, all she could think about was how she didn’t want to make Tatsuya hate her.

Her untied housecoat fluttered open, and the swell of her bare breasts were visible to Tatsuya through her negligee.

Tatsuya raised his line of sight so that he wouldn't be able to see anything below Miyuki’s shoulders, and answered her question while enduring his discomfort.

“Before coming to the laboratory, please take a bath. Even a shower would be fine, but please cleanse your body before coming.”

“Okay.”

Miyuki answered in a shrill voice. However, she didn’t notice since she was worried that Tatsuya might hear her pounding heartbeat.

“As for your attire, please wear a housecoat over your underwear, no, swimsuit.”

Miyuki was so shocked, she felt as though her heart would explode.

“Yes. I-Is it for tuning a CAD...?”

Since it was the laboratory, she knew that it could be the only reason.

However, she asked him that on purpose to suppress her excitement.

“No, not for that.”

Tatsuya looked away while saying that.

His behavior astonished Miyuki.

—That brother of hers was actually being shy!?

“I’ll tell you what we’ll be doing then. I’m sorry, but I’m counting on you.”

Tatsuya said that rapidly while diverting his eyes as he left Miyuki’s room.

As soon as the door closed, Miyuki sank weakly to the floor.

Her hands felt hot against her cheeks.

While strongly thinking to herself, “I must wake up by 3:00 AM,” she scolded her weak legs and headed to bed. Although she felt that going to sleep was impossible, she told herself that it would be outrageous to show up looking awful due to the lack of sleep, and forced herself to sleep.

She might have passed out from overthinking, but this was better compared to being unable to sleep due to her excitement.

Regardless of the fact that she had only slept for three hours, Miyuki woke up at 3:00 A.M. She washed her body conscientiously and put on fresh underwear. Over it, she wore a housecoat with the belt tied. After all, Tatsuya did tell her to wear a “swimsuit,” but she had a feeling that underwear would be more appropriate for this situation.

She brushed her hair many times in front of the dressing table. Despite the fact that Miyuki’s hair never got entangled and it was enough to comb it only once, she brushed through it plenty.

The cosmetics caught her eyes, but she decided not to use any makeup.

This was because she thought that Tatsuya didn’t want it on her. She also used a shampoo that will leave no fragrance, and she didn’t want to put on any adornments. This was how Miyuki interpreted Tatsuya’s statement, “I want you to cleanse your body.”

Miyuki headed for the laboratory in the basement before 4:00 AM. It was the

room where they first tested the flying device.

“It’s Miyuki.”

“Please enter.”

Miyuki took one deep breath and opened the laboratory door. Miyuki unintentionally stopped, but entered the room soon after and closed the door.

Her surprise at Tatsuya’s appearance stopped her in her tracks. Tatsuya wore nothing but a tight half-pants type bathing trunks.

Even though there was heating in the hallway, it felt even warmer inside.

For sure, the temperature had been adjusted so that it wasn’t cold with just swimsuits alone.

Miyuki hesitated for a moment.

She loosened her belt, then let her housecoat slip to the floor.

Now, it was Tatsuya’s turn to hold his breath. He had thought Miyuki would be wearing a swimsuit that was similar to a one-piece design that barely showed any skin under the housecoat.

But in reality...

Miyuki was wearing a set of white underwear that was made of mostly lace. Most of her skin was visible through the fabric.

If the color had been red or black, the design would have provoked strong sexual appeal. However, white underwear gave off an elegant impression. Of course, the atmosphere that Miyuki herself created must have had a big impact too. In addition to what she had on her body.

“...Onii-sama?”

Miyuki, whose cheeks were blushed in embarrassment — upon close inspection, it was not only the area around her eyes and cheeks, but also everything from her neck to her breasts had turned slightly flushed — she diverted her gaze slightly downwards as she spoke to Tatsuya.

“Please, tell me what you want me to do...”

For example, even if she was commanded “take off your underwear”, Miyuki

would not defy it. Her voice indicated her readiness.

“—Before we get to the main point, listen to me for a bit.”

“—Of course.”

Tatsuya started talking to Miyuki while they stood about two meters apart, facing each other.

“As you know, my ‘eyes’ can’t see the future. I do not have the convenient ability to automatically select what I want to know in the unconscious area and project it into consciousness. The law of causality dictates that I have to select everything consciously. Otherwise, it would be crazy to expect to get to the information I am looking for.”

“I think that it is an amazing ability, being able to reliably get the information you’re consciously looking for.”

Tatsuya didn’t show humbleness at Miyuki’s praise.

“Certainly, but it takes time to filter information like this. Selecting information consciously is more reliable than unconsciously. Furthermore, at the rate that I have to follow the genealogical tree of cause and effect for this ‘clairvoyance’, it is certain that we will need more resources in the future.”

“Do you mean magical resources?”

“Attention, concentration, perseverance, multi-layered cognitive capability... these are not only related to magic. It is not inconvenient to lump them together with ‘magic-related resources.’ In fact, that would make it easier for a person to understand.”

“OK, I will understand it as such.”

As she was drawn into Tatsuya’s story, it didn’t take long until Miyuki stopped averting her gaze.

After a nod to Miyuki, who looked at him with enthusiasm, Tatsuya continued his explanation.

“Now we’ll move on to discussing the not so well-known details. Let’s start with the current mission. I ‘saw’ the target Gu Jie in Zama. Thereafter, no ties could be connected to Gu Jie, even without new cause and effect relations.

Using only the information directly related to Gu Jie himself, we should be able to locate him. Even still, we need to gather sufficient resources.”

“Are your magic-related resources insufficient? Is there any way I can assist you?”

“No, if I pour all my resources into it I can find a specific individual using special structure information within the country. It wouldn’t even need 100% of it. I think that allocating 70% of my resources to Elemental Sight is sufficient.”

While hearing that, Miyuki knitted her eyebrows suspiciously. But within 5 seconds, she opened her eyes with a startled expression.

“So you can’t find him as you can’t allocate enough hyper-perception resources. Is this because you are spending those resources as my guardian!?”

Tatsuya nodded with a bitter expression.

“I am always allocating half of my Elemental Sight resources for you.”

However far she is away, Tatsuya’s magic removes threats towards Miyuki.

He is capable of such a thing because Tatsuya always “sees” Miyuki.

‘Always’ means twenty-four hours a day without exaggeration.

However, he is watching her with his unconscious sight while sleeping.

He continues to ‘see’ and check if a crisis is approaching Miyuki.

Tatsuya is confident that he will wake up immediately, however deep his sleep may be.

No, that has nothing to do with confidence. It is a system that works with 100% reliability.

Because of that, what is normally possible can sometimes not be done because of a shortage of resources. This was the case right now.

“Onii-sama, please release the resources you set aside for me right now! I am here. There is no reason to watch me with Elemental Sight now!”

It was only natural for her character that Miyuki said this. Tatsuya was saying that he was unable to complete his mission because of her. Even if it was someone other than Miyuki, they would insist on the same thing.

“I cannot do that.”

Tatsuya shook his head.

“Why? There are no enemies here. This room is in the basement and surrounded by thick walls. It’s a place difficult to penetrate from the outside, even with magic. For example, even if we are attacked with magic, because of the large quantity of sensors installed for experiments you will immediately notice that. I think you know that even better than me, Onii-sama.”

“Your reasoning is correct.”

Bashfully — Miyuki stared at Tatsuya who seemed to be embarrassed with question marks in her eyes while waiting for him to continue.

“That is correct... but I can’t do that because of emotional issues that I have.”

Miyuki stopped breathing. The question marks floating in her eyes turned entirely into exclamation marks.

“Miyuki. I am anxious to take my ‘eyes’ off you. Even if my ‘eyes’ leave you for one hundredth of a second, I am thinking about everything I could possibly not ‘see’ about you... that makes me crazy.”

“Onii-sama...”

Miyuki forces herself to breathe. She barely managed to say that one word.

Tatsuya has only one genuine emotion left. The love for his little sister Miyuki. Miyuki also knows this from hearing it from their mother.

But it is the first time Tatsuya himself told Miyuki that he loves her so strongly that it’s making him crazy.

“I understand the logic. You're right next to me, so even if I were to take my "eyes" off you, I would notice right away if something happened. Moreover, you are not so weak that you would be injured just because I took my eyes off you for a second or two. It's different from that time in Okinawa. I understand that as well.”

Tatsuya averted his eyes from Miyuki and sighed in a self-mocking manner.

“However, even if I agree with your reasoning, my emotions are not

convinced. If I leave Gu Jie alone, things like today will happen again. As a result, I know that the risk of you being exposed to violence will increase. To resolve this situation I understand that I should concentrate my Elemental Sight ability on Gu Jie. This is where my emotions get in the way.”

Tatsuya pointed to his heart with the thumb of his right hand and shook his head as if he found himself to be in a pitiful state.

“I feel like I learned for the first time that emotions are such a troublesome thing.”

Miyuki rushed over to unburden Tatsuya by wrapping his right hand and squeezing it.

“...Is there anything I can do for you?”

Tatsuya made eye contact with Miyuki.

Tatsuya looks deep into Miyuki’s eyes.

“Yes. Miyuki, please lend me a hand.”

“Yes, anything you want!”

This time Miyuki completely forgot her shame temporarily.

Because of this mood, Tatsuya was a little embarrassed.

“I asked myself why I can’t take my ‘eyes’ from you and found one answer.”

While he was questioned by Miyuki’s look, Tatsuya suppressed his bashfulness and voiced his conclusion.

“What frightens me is probably the fact that I cannot feel certain that you are safe.”

“...But Onii-sama. Miyuki is right here.”

Miyuki could not understand why Tatsuya said that he couldn't feel certain about it, even though he could see that she was right in front of him.

“The naked eye can only see light and shadow.”

But there is no other way. What is it that Tatsuya was looking at with his “eyes”? There is nobody besides Tatsuya who knew the answer to that.

“If you usually see with nothing but the naked eye, only seeing light and shadow would be enough to relieve the anxiety. However, this is a problem because I always look at you with my different ‘eyes’.”

The information that can be read by Tatsuya’s hyper-perception far exceeds the signals that can be acquired through the five senses. Tatsuya is constantly observing Miyuki with that hyper-perception, his “Spirit Eyes”. Compared to other people, objects, and landscapes Miyuki is an existence with a by far deeper and overwhelming substance, that for Tatsuya can’t be perceived just by the five senses.

It might be an exaggeration to say that Tatsuya saw people other than Miyuki as shadow figures on a cave wall, but maybe he felt that they were like superficial images.

“By only watching with the naked eye I don’t have the feeling that you are safe. This is obstructing the release of the resources.”

Tatsuya lays his left hand on Miyuki’s hands that are squeezing his right hand.

“Therefore, Miyuki. Let me feel relieved.”

Miyuki, entranced by Tatsuya’s look, was unaware she was nodding.

Tatsuya was sitting just in his swim wear with his legs crossed in the middle of the laboratory. It was neither the full-lotus position, nor the half-lotus position. It was just a relaxed seating position.

No, saying “just” would be an understatement. Miyuki was wearing only a bra and panties decorated with lace, so she turned her back to Tatsuya’s body and had sat down on his crossed legs.

Tatsuya wrapped his arms around Miyuki’s body. He held her left hand with his right and her right hand with his left. As if the position was made to declare “I will never let you go.”

Miyuki’s body was tensed and she was looking down. Her skin, not only the face but her whole body, was slightly red up to the tips of the toes.

She is not “bright red like a ripe tomato” because her excitement and tension

were keeping a miraculous balance. —To all appearances, it looked like it was bad for her health.

“Miyuki.”

Tatsuya spoke into Miyuki’s ear. The heat of his breath tickled her earlobe.

“Please relax a bit more.”

Contrary to Tatsuya’s words, Miyuki put more strength in her hands held by him.

“T-That’s impossible...!”

Miyuki replied in a strangled whisper. She couldn't scream because she was having trouble breathing properly.

The hands holding hers were big and manly.

The arms passed by her body were tightened firmly and strong.

From Tatsuya’s chest, that was glued to her back, the body heat of a person that is both an older brother and fiancé was transmitted.

Is that violently pounding heartbeat coming from Tatsuya’s heart or her own? Miyuki couldn’t differentiate anymore.

“Your temperature has increased a little. Calm down.”

Miyuki was so embarrassed that she almost died. At least, she wanted to hide her face with both hands. In the current state where her left and right hand was restrained this was not possible. It was comforting at least that he could not see her face because she turned her back to him.

However, it was definitely not unpleasant. Rather, Miyuki was delighted that she was hugged like this.

Therefore she was even more embarrassed.

—Even though they're not doing anything particularly indecent—

Miyuki became frantic and told herself so. She was without doubt a well brought-up girl, but as an average 2nd year student in high school — limited as it may be, she had some knowledge about those topics anyways.

Only wearing underwear while participating in physical contact with a member of the opposite sex was unladylike, but this was an extreme case for sure, wasn't it? Though, she was being hugged from behind.

Tatsuya's hands are connected to Miyuki's hands.

Miyuki's hands are connected to Tatsuya's hands.

There is no trace of caressing between Tatsuya and Miyuki.

And yet—

(My body seems to be melting away together with my heart...)

Even though her mind had effectively shut down, she remained conscious.

Tatsuya's whispering voice crept into Miyuki's ear.

"The softness of your skin and the warmth of your body can even be felt with closed eyes. You are certainly in my arms."

"I am here. Here, where I am protected by Onii-sama."



The words crossed her lips without thinking.

“Right, Onii-sama?”

“You don’t need to worry about a thing.”

“Feel free to do as you please.”

“Please use all of your power as you see fit.”

It might have been a kind of trance-like state.

A prophecy given by a shrine maiden who is possessed by a god. It was

something similar to that.

Miyuki's words pulled the trigger on Tatsuya's "power".

The resources focused on Miyuki became free.

Tatsuya's "eyes" are dashing through the information sea to look for answers.

He is traversing back and forth the genealogical tree of cause and effect, repeating a process of trial and error many times in one moment—

And finally, he caught the figure of the enemy.

◇ ◇ ◇

Gu Jie, the ringleader of the Hakone terror attack, the ancient magician who manipulated corpses coming from the former Dahan, was dragged out from the garden of sleep by a sudden piercing gaze.

He did not know from where he was watched. It was neither from the inside nor the outside of this room.

As if the gaze he had been seen with came not from this world, but from beyond.

Gu Jie deployed a spell blocking formation before attempting to identify the true identity of that gaze. It was a counter magic improved by the Kunlunfang Institute to just get the result without actually tracing the Ursa Major in the 'Pacing the Big Dipper' Taoist ritual. This method prevents the intrusion of SBs, but its defense capabilities against modern magic are limited. He did not know if it would repel the attack that must certainly follow after the gaze.

An instant after he braced himself, the defense formation was destroyed by a bullet-like Psion burst that was focused into a single point.

Gu Jie constructed a new defensive barrier in a hurry.

Gu Jie held his breath for a while.

There was no follow-up attack.

Any sign of the gaze disappeared.

Gu Jie exhaled in a sigh of relief and checked the damage that he had taken. He felt no pain anywhere in his body, but there were plenty of magic spells that

could shave away a person's lifespan without said person feeling a thing.

But strangely, no matter how much Gu Jie, who was well-versed in such deadly curses searched, he could not find an injury caused by the recent attack. There were no signs that a delayed effect or conditional activation type magic had been used either.

It was eerie that he couldn't understand the effect of the attack, but that would have to wait until later. It was certain that this location had been exposed through some unknown means. He immediately decided to move to a different location.



Miyuki regained her sanity when a strong magic sign was emitted from Tatsuya's body. Before she could become captivated in shame again, Tatsuya let go of her hands and loosened his arms to free Miyuki.

Miyuki got quickly up from him with caution so Tatsuya wouldn't feel uncomfortable.

Miyuki stiffened when she sensed Tatsuya standing up behind her, but the expected, or rather hoped for, embrace failed to happen. Tatsuya simply walked right past Miyuki.

Tatsuya stopped in front of the door. He spoke without turning back to Miyuki, who was looking at his back.

"Thank you, Miyuki."

The tremors that ran through Miyuki's body were not caused by the cold.

"Was Miyuki able to help you?"

Miyuki asked this with a voice hoarse from pleasure.

"Yes, of course."

Tatsuya answered without turning around and chuckled.

"Let's get dressed before we have a detailed conversation."

Miyuki's face turned deep red, and she put her hands over her breasts and squatted down on the spot to calm down.

Tatsuya kept his back turned to her and left the laboratory.

It wasn't even 5 AM yet, but Miyuki didn't feel like going back to bed now. Even though she was a little sweaty, Miyuki decided to take a shower after she listened to Tatsuya. She changed into a house coat, not the uniform.

When she came to the dining room, Tatsuya had been waiting in training wear at the table.

"Good morning, Miyuki-sama."

"Morning, Minami-chan."

Not only Tatsuya was there. Was it because of her professionalism that Minami was completely armed in maid clothes?

"Are you fine with tea?"

"Yes, thank you."

After Miyuki sat down on the opposite side of Tatsuya, a freshly poured hot green tea was offered to her. The reviving taste cleared and awakened her mind.

"Minami, it's fine for now. Rest a little."

"I will do that, Tatsuya-sama."

Minami bowed and left the dining room. Tatsuya's words were not because of worry for her. She didn't resist because she understood that he could not talk in front of her.

Tatsuya waited until Minami completely left the dining room, before he turned to Miyuki.

"Miyuki."

"Yes, Onii-sama?"

Miyuki's already straight back tensed even more. When being spoken to by Tatsuya, Miyuki vividly recalled the heat of their bare skin touching.

Miyuki's tongue and body were tied by the tension of her embarrassment.

“Sorry about earlier.”

But under Tatsuya’s worried look for her, Miyuki’s tension soon melted and then disappeared.

“...I am happy that Miyuki could help Onii-sama, no, rather not being a burden for Onii-sama.”

Miyuki shook her head sideways with small movements without taking her eyes off Tatsuya and smiled bewitchingly.

“Rather than talking about that. Onii-sama, what was the result?”

To make sure Tatsuya couldn’t delay any longer, she changed the topic to the mission at hand.

Tatsuya did not let Miyuki’s solicitude go to waste.

“I caught him for sure.”

“Then is it already settled?”

Miyuki wasn't conscious of it, but she did not consider killing people to be taboo. Or rather, she did not consider Tatsuya killing another person to be taboo.

Any person killed by Tatsuya without a doubt deserved to die.

Her personality had grown twisted in this manner over time, without her being aware of it.

“No, I did not erase him.”

When he caught the information of a being, physical distance didn’t matter for Tatsuya. Both creatures and non-creatures, humans included, can be turned into dust and erased. Tatsuya understood precisely what Miyuki meant with “settled” and shook his head to that question.

“May I know the reason?”

Miyuki’s question didn’t criticize Tatsuya’s decision. She was purely interested in the reason. Miyuki didn’t understand the reason for the commiseration for Gu Jie.

“The goal of this mission is not to kill the enemy. It is to show the society that

the terror attack incident was settled.”

Even though Tatsuya’s answer was indirect, but that much was sufficient for Miyuki.

“Do you mean that it is impossible to accomplish the mission when you erase the mastermind secretly?”

“Exactly. Oba-ue told me that she didn’t care if he was alive or dead.

But of course it is best to capture him alive. Even if I kill him I have to show where I cornered him and need to leave a corpse.”

“That means you will have to kill him in a manner where people can still tell that he is the mastermind behind the terror incident.”

Tatsuya nods at Miyuki’s words.

Miyuki was glad that Tatsuya accepted this as correct, but suddenly opened her eyes wide.

“Then, do you have the free time to keep me company here right now? You located his whereabouts with a lot of effort. Shouldn’t we go out to capture him immediately?”

Tatsuya showed the impatient Miyuki a composed smile.

“It’s OK. I marked him earlier.”

“A mark...?”

“Yes. With the method I learned when I took down Zhou Gongjin.”

When he was in Kyoto to pursue Zhou Gongjin, Tatsuya was not able to break Zhou’s Ghost Walker by himself. Zhou Gongjin did not escape because before that Nakura was defeated in a fight with Zhou and the blood that was controlled by Nakura, to be more precise the blood having Nakura’s ‘desire’ in it, revealed Zhou Gongjin’s position.

Tatsuya has no technique to transfer his blood. As a substitute for blood, he developed a magic technique that creates a signal bullet which can be traced over several days. The bullet consisted of a high amount of condensed Psions which he learned to make as a countermeasure against the parasites. He can

keep track of the geographical coordinates with this magic and when he comes close to the them. Tatsuya can completely void Ghost Walker with the “spirit” manipulation technique he learned from Yakumo afterwards.

“There was no opportunity in Zama, but I surely shot it earlier. I can locate the whereabouts of Gu Jie without investing more resources.”

At last Tatsuya declared this.

He is going to catch him.

Miyuki didn’t doubt his words.



Tatsuya went out to Kyuuchouji Temple to train as he normally did, but he wasn’t delaying the mission due to pride or conceit.

As he explained to Miyuki, this mission was not just about simply capturing or killing the mastermind. Arrangements to organize a search party needed to be made first. It was still too early to contact the involved people.

Until it was time to move, he went to Yakumo’s temple for his usual training.

However, after the usual bout of sparring, they had a slightly different conversation than usual.

“Tatsuya-kun, how is your mission going?”

Yakumo asked this in a small talk tone while they were drinking tea brought by a disciple on the floor in the main temple building.

“Not good.”

Tatsuya answered and omitted saying until yesterday.

“In spite of that, you don't seem particularly worried.”

Yakumo asked this not suspiciously, but cheerfully.

“It’s none of my business after all.”

The words he didn’t say this time were, “until the day before yesterday.” When Miyuki was attacked by anti-magic supporters, the capture and obliteration of the mastermind, Gu Jie, became Tatsuya’s top priority.

“None of your business... Regardless, you seem to be working diligently.”

“Because it’s my mission. I can’t refuse.”

Ignoring Yakumo’s face that was twisted into a grin, Tatsuya asked a question in return.

“However, this is unusual. Master cares about my mission?”

“This is not unusual. Wasn’t I helping you with various things up until now like the ‘vampire incident’ or the ‘parasite doll incident’?”

“In other words, does that mean that this is a situation that Master can’t ignore this time?”

“Even if you are a monk you are not completely freed from matters of the world. It’s awful.”

Tatsuya failed to see any degree of discomfort that could be described as ‘awful’ from the expression of the carefree answering Yakumo.

“Then could you please help me with the search of Gu Jie, the ancient magician from the former Dahan, who is the mastermind of the terror attack?”

Tatsuya found the idea of being led around in circles in this manner somewhat distasteful, so he brazenly tried asking Yakumo for support.

He had said this sarcastically, assuming that it would be refused.

“All right.”

So when the immediate response was a nod, Tatsuya wasn’t able to respond for a moment.

“What’s wrong with you? It seems like you are somehow surprised.”

Of course, Tatsuya was aware that it would be his defeat if he didn't manage to stay calm. So he obediently raised the white flag. —It was a defeat either way.

“I was surprised. Because I thought that you surely wouldn’t agree immediately.”

“It’s merely cooperation. Just to help a little.”

Tatsuya could not see what Yakumo was really thinking behind that carefree smiling expression he was wearing as usual.

“Then I will think about what I would like to request from you.”

“That’s fine. I will lend you my power to the extent I’m capable of. Oh, but don't go asking me to teach you any techniques any more.”

“I know.”

At this time Tatsuya was unaware that he had been tricked into allowing Yakumo to intervene.



After Tatsuya returned from training, he changed into his school uniform and went to school as usual.

They hadn’t forgotten that the school was closed from today to the weekend. Miyuki’s and Minami’s personal items were left at school because they returned home immediately after the police interrogation yesterday. They were going to collect these.

There is no need to bring textbooks and notebooks to and from school unlike one hundred years ago. But changing clothes for P.E. as well as practice and club activities were necessary.

If they don’t want to take care of the details, they can pay a low price to the school for cleaning changing clothes. Even though female students would entrust their uniform to the company, none of them would hand over their underwear for cleaning.

Besides, girls tended to carry various things around anyways. Male students mostly came to school empty-handed, whereas girls would bring some personal items of different sizes.

The gates were shut because the school was closed, but the procedure to enter the school went smoothly since they were wearing the proper uniform, brought their student ID’s and had a legitimate reason. They arrived at school without being attacked nor delayed by a demonstration. In that case we’ll be home again soon, the trio thought.

This expectation itself was not wrong. It's just that there was an unexpected person in the school.

"Shiba-san!"

"Ichijou-san?"

In the classroom of class 2A, Masaki was going to the desk by himself.

"...Are you studying?"

Miyuki spontaneously asked that question even though the answer was obvious. It was too surprising to see a person alone with an open terminal for online studies in the classroom while the school is closed.

"Uh, yes."

Masaki also realized that his current appearance might be interpreted as strange, he replies to Miyuki's question with a forced smile.

"Because there are still lessons at Third High today..."

"Oh."

For now, even though they were surprised by it at first, Tatsuya as well as Miyuki were convinced by his explanation. Masaki had been given a seat at First High so he could take the classroom lessons of Third High. It's a 'seat' rather than "being enrolled". Naturally, their school being closed had no bearing on the state of Third High.

Masaki had a forced smile for Miyuki's surprise which could be called a reasonable reaction.

"Since Third High seems to be closed from tomorrow onwards as well, I think today I'm going to leave in the afternoon."

In that case, wouldn't it have been better to take a break today? These lines were on the tip of his tongue, but he didn't voice them after all.

Because precisely at that time, the terminal Masaki was using made a warning sound. Masaki returned his eyes to the terminal with an 'Oops' expression. To not disturb Masaki, Miyuki went with quiet footsteps through the classroom to the lockers in the back and silently took out her baggage.

Miyuki walked to a spot diagonally across from Masaki, bowed once, and silently left the classroom along with Tatsuya.

◇ ◇ ◇

They didn't encounter any trouble on their way back from First High. Rather than feeling it was ominous, Tatsuya felt a sense of disappointment. Although, Tatsuya also thought that the activists had enough common sense to not cause disturbances at the same location for two consecutive days.

Due to this, Tatsuya was able to focus on the original search activity, and there was no reason for him to harbor dissatisfaction. Based on the information that Masaki was only available from the afternoon onwards, Tatsuya made arrangements for the pursuit of Gu Jie.

"Tatsuya-kun, you've tracked down the ringleader, haven't you?"

"Yes. Some time ago I got a message from our parent's house."

"I see..."

Mayumi made a frustrated expression on the visiphone's screen in reaction to Tatsuya's lie. She was feeling immense shame in how the Yotsuba Family was one step ahead even though the incident happened in Saegusa territory.

However, there was actually no big progress from the Yotsuba Family's side either, but Tatsuya of course didn't say that.

"Gu Jie, the mastermind behind the Hakone terror attack incident, is hiding in Hiratsuka right now."

"Eh, Hiratsuka!?"

"The enemy has hardly moved since this began. He was only moving in a limited range. We mistakenly assumed that the person behind a large-scale incident would not stay in a densely populated area and this was used against us."

"I see..."

The irritation of Mayumi's face was directed to herself, her father, as well as her older brother.

The search party from the Saegusa Family commanded by her older brother Tomokazu took the current personnel from Koto City and lead them to Narita. As a result of the investigation, they were judging that the possibility of the target hiding in the districts Hakone, Izu and Miura Peninsula was low.

However, the criminal was lurking in the area that was supposedly searched. That means that the net of the investigation was too loose.

This lead Mayumi to feel like the Saegusa Family is not as thorough, rather, they were inferior to the Yotsuba's Family in the Ten Master Clans.

"Saegusa-senpai, may I continue to talk?"

"Excuse me, please do."

Even though he could not read Mayumi's heart, he could see that Mayumi was tormented by powerlessness from her expression.

But Tatsuya didn't comfort her and instead brought her attention back to the task at hand.

"To not give him any time for escape preparations, I think we should move immediately to capture him. However, it's not a good idea to resolve the Hakone terror incident on our own. We have to consider the honor of the police as well."

"That's right. A large-scale bomb incident occurred in the immediate surroundings of the capital. The prestige of the police depends on the arrest of the criminal. If we solve this with our private magicians alone, it would result in leaving a sour feeling between us and the police..."

Even if Gu Jie is caught, if the relationship with the police and the Ten Master Clans deteriorates because they caught Gu Jie, it is a loss for magicians at the end of the day.

As the Saegusa Family was also active in having acquaintances other than magicians, Mayumi understood immediately what Tatsuya was trying to say.

"Therefore, Saegusa-senpai. Can we mobilize the police for the capture of Gu Jie?"

When she was asked by Tatsuya, Mayumi frowned.

“Under what pretext? I'm sure you're aware, but we can't obtain an arrest warrant just because the Yotsuba Family declares someone as the criminal.”

Tatsuya nodded without moving an eyebrow to Mayumi's statement.

“I know. If the police could be moved with normal procedures, I wouldn't think of bothering you to lend a hand. Because there is not enough evidence to convince a judicial institution, I thought that the Saegusa Family, who have good connections with the police in the Kanto region, would be able to convince the police to move.”

Even though she knew that it was an open provocation, Mayumi couldn't hide her displeased expression.

“I will try to voice that once but... honestly speaking, when it comes to influencing the police, Tatsuya-kun's girlfriend is better suited for that.”

Nevertheless, Mayumi would never make a mistake like rising to the bait promising aid without considering the consequences. Mayumi talked about Erika intentionally as “girlfriend” to try to tease him.

However, with Tatsuya as an opponent such an obvious attempt at showing composure is completely useless.

“Well, if senpai says she doesn't mind talking to the Chiba Family, let's talk with Erika.”

In this situation, mainly the Saegusa Family would lose their face.

“For god's sake, stop!”

Mayumi couldn't stand to face the criticism from her family if she were to go ahead and approve the participation of the Chiba Family on her own. It was only natural for her to raise her voice and put a stop to it.

“Also, as I told you, I would like to start tonight.”

“Understood! I'll arrange everything by evening! Please stop bullying me!”

“Thank you very much.”

Tatsuya did not object to Mayumi's line “Please stop bullying me!”.

After talking to Mayumi, Tatsuya also finished talking to Katsuto and Masaki

via video call. When Tatsuya was in the midst of thinking if he could rest till the time he had to leave, the bell rang informing him of arriving guests.

The visitors were Fumiya and Ayako.

“Welcome, Ayako-san and Fumiya-kun. But didn’t you have school today?”

Miyuki, who by chance chose clothes that could be used to go out, asked that question while inviting the two of them into the living room.

It was still before 4 pm. The school time of Magic High Schools was the same everywhere. Every Monday to Friday until 3:20 P.M., except for extracurricular lessons. There wasn’t enough time even if they came from Fourth High directly to this house. The pair — not only Fumiya but also Ayako — were wearing typical, inconspicuous streetwear.

Since they didn’t bring any baggage, they were wondering if they came here after checking into a hotel. It was only natural that Miyuki asked “What about school?” if she didn’t know the circumstances.

“Excuse us for disturbing you, Miyuki-oneesama. Since today Fourth High is temporarily closed as well.”

“Is that so? I heard that Third High had still classes today.”

To Tatsuya’s question, Fumiya answered.

“Following in the same form as the decision of First High, Second High and Fourth High are temporarily closed from today on. I heard that the other five schools will also follow suit from tomorrow on.”

“This matter has become extremely exaggerated.”

Tatsuya muttered like it was someone else’s affair, but he himself was an involved party that triggered yesterday’s incident. To comment on this like an outsider was wrong to begin with. Was it good or bad that a person pointing that out wasn’t present?

Because Miyuki was the student council president of First High, it would have been appropriate for her to originally know this information, but the reason she didn’t hear it was that she entrusted the reporting to the school to Izumi yesterday. Miyuki muttered “I have to make amends to Izumi-chan” without

giving it voice. —If Izumi knew this, she would have danced in a delirium of joy.

Tatsuya turned his gaze towards the pair in front of him without remembering things like Izumi.

“Well then, may I ask for the reason why you came?”

The twins sitting opposite of Tatsuya communicated with eye contact to decide who'd answer. —They weren't trying to push off the responsibility to each other.

“We confirmed the corpse of the ancient magician about which we received information from Tatsuya-niisan. Oumi Kazukiyo is the ancient magician with the nickname “Puppet Master”, whose specialty technique is an SB magic from the continent that possesses and controls corpses with spiritual beings. Our target now, Gu Jie, is a user of a different type of corpse manipulation technique, right?”

“Rather than manipulating the corpses directly, manipulating them by letting them be possessed with SB's... It is different than what I heard from Gu Jie's magic. Weren't they supposed to be adherents of the same school of magic?”

To Tatsuya's question, Fumiya nodded without taking time to think.

“Oumi is the descendant of Taoists who immigrated from the continent about 150 years ago. Rather than traditional magicians from Dahan and the Great Asian Alliance amongst others, his art is said to be faithful to tradition and it looks like that was his secret root of pride.”

“He is the descendant of magicians who immigrated before the existence of magic became known?”

They think of themselves as inheritors of traditional magic, but if you look at it from the perspective of the ancient magicians who settled down in this country several hundred years before, they are newcomers. It's not hard to imagine that they didn't feel at home. It could be that the parents' intention behind the strange old-fashioned names was to make themselves fit amongst the Japanese practitioners. The person himself seemed to have gone the other way.

“The relations with the Onmyoji system ancient magicians were particularly bad.”

“Therefore he was taken advantage of by Gu Jie there.”

“Probably.”

“Even if you want to feel sympathy towards his situation, that is no justification for his actions.”

“Not that I have any intention of sympathizing in the first place”, Tatsuya muttered, and resumed the questioning.

“How about intelligence related to other collaborators?”

“After analyzing the remaining thoughts in the corpse of Oumi, it seems that Gu Jie newly acquired corpses of two people. ...I’m sorry, I don’t know the identity of the corpses.”

“Because the Kuroba as well as the Tsukuba don’t know anything about this, it’s highly likely to be a rather high-level magician.”

“Yoshimi-san and Yuuka-san agree with Tatsuya-niisan as well.”

Once they become corpses, magicians and non-magicians as the same.

Corpses of magicians and non-magicians alike impede examination by magic. However, if a corpse were to keep the abilities it possessed while the person was still alive, there was a good chance that they could repel detection methods that used perception-type magic.

The followers of Gu Jie that were in No Head Dragon had the technology to process the brains of magicians into auxiliary tools called “Sorcery Booster” that put a specific magic into operation. There are no grounds anywhere to assume that Gu Jie cannot do the same thing.

In addition, at Kamakura, Gu Jie was going to use the bodies of the magicians that were remodeled into generators after they died as well. If you can’t use the abilities one had during their lifetime, there is no such need. One is efficient if one blows oneself up and involves the enemy into it the same moment one dies.

Anyways, Tatsuya thought. By what logic can a corpse keep the abilities that it possessed while still alive?

Magic is the power of the mind, that is the common opinion. There is no

evidence to deny this at all.

However, at the same time the answer to the fundamental question “What is the mind?” has not appeared at this point as well. Everything there is now is of the hypothesis or speculation type.

These hypotheses vary from things that are almost established theories in fields where the opinion is divided. For example, concerning the question “What is the mind made of?” the theory “It is made of Pushions.” is widely supported. On the other hand concerning the topic “Where is the mind?” there are various theories such as “It’s in the information dimension.”, “There exists a mind dimension.”, “It exists as an entity in this world.”, and “It’s not in a fixed location but always flowing.” and all hypotheses have certain supporters.

If the dead can use magic and the power of the mind is available, being alive is not a necessary condition for having a mind. No, what is the essential difference of “life” and “death” to begin with?

Tatsuya intuitively knows that he can’t revive people in whom death has unfurled. It’s instinct rather than intuition. His characteristic magic “Regrowth” taught him that. That’s why there is nothing else but a clear border between life and death.

However, if a corpse can use the power of the mind called magic, a corpse should also be able to draw out mind products such as intent, memory, and emotion. A corpse also providing the same personality it while being alive may also be possible for the aforementioned reasons.

Where is that different from a living person...

“Onii-sama?” “Tatsuya-san?” “Tatsuya-niisan?”

“Ah, sorry.”

The voices of Miyuki, Ayako, and Fumiya pulled back his thoughts that had entered into digressions. Tatsuya seemed to have thought for a rather long time.

“No, you were for sure in the middle of your thoughts, I am sorry.”

“No. Rather...”

Before Tatsuya got into an apology contest with Miyuki, he changed the topic.

“Returning to the first question, what is the reason that the two of you came here? Although communication is potentially intercepted, delivering the investigation results won’t be the only purpose.”

Tatsuya stared at Fumiya and Ayako at the same time.

“Did you come over to guard Miyuki while I’m out?”

Fumiya and Ayako looked at each other and Ayako sighed.

“Tatsuya-san, I’m wondering whether or not your understanding of things is too good.”

Ayako’s words “Your understanding of things is too good” was in a dictionary definition sense of “You understand amongst other things the point of view and feelings of the other too well.” and wasn’t the complimentary “You are a good-natured person”. It was a protest that she wanted to stop his “seeing through anything and everything.”

“So we can avoid acting together with families such as the Juumonji and Saegusa, we are out of this operation. It’s the same for people such as my father and Yuuka-san.”

Certainly, the mission this time was not so important that they had to make it succeed even at the risk of leaking the details of the Kuroba's and Tsukuba's unique advanced mental interference magic to the Ten Master Clans. The Yotsuba could satisfy their duty by just having Tatsuya participate.

“The school is closed until the weekend so we volunteered to be the guards for Miyuki-oneesama. Even though I say guard, Miyuki-oneesama’s power is overwhelmingly stronger than ours, though.”

“That’s why we are in your care until Sunday.”

To Fumiya and Ayako, who were lowering their heads, Tatsuya nodded while smiling bitterly.

“No, I can also be relieved if I know that you are involved. Will you be staying in a hotel until Sunday?”

“Yes, that’s the case, but we were wondering if we could stay over

alternately? We do not need a bedroom.”

In other words Fumiya says that they want to guard the house at night.

Indeed, the role of a guard is a serious matter.

“If you two don’t mind sharing the same room, it’s fine that you check out of the hotel and stay in our house.”

The former guest room became Minami’s room, but the room their mother used when she was alive is practically vacant at this time. As the twin bed was left as it was, there is no problem with sleeping there as well. Even in case their father Tatsurou comes home on a whim, they just have to repel him to the mansion of his second wife. Because the position of Tatsuya’s side is already stronger than Tatsurou’s position.

“...Nee-san, what will we do?”

Whether on duty or on personal affairs, staying at this house was convenient for Fumiya. That’s the same for Ayako. In spite of that Fumiya asked Ayako so, because he thought about that his older sister might have unpleasant feelings to the point of “Sleeping in the same room”.

Fumiya’s concern was not necessarily irrelevant, Ayako frowned subtly.

Even though they are twins, in spite of that she was a daughter of marriageable age and if that meant staying in the same room with the opposite sex, she would feel hesitant.

Miyuki, who noticed her conflict, tried to propose to lodge Ayako in her own room. However, Ayako answered a moment too early.

“Thank you for your offer. Tatsuya-san, Miyuki-oneesama, Minami-chan, we are in your care.”

“Likewise, I’ll leave it to you. Minami, will you arrange the room for the two to stay in?”

“Of course.”

It’s a rather late time to start with cleaning and making the bed now.

However, Minami answered with these words and bowed to Tatsuya without

showing any displeasure.

“Then we’ll fetch our luggage from the hotel.”

Ayako says so and stands up together with Fumiya.

“I will also go out soon. The probability that I cannot return today is high. Miyuki, I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“Yes, Onii-sama.”

“Tatsuya-san, I wish you good luck in the battle.”

Tatsuya and Miyuki also stood up a breath later.

“I’ll try to get it done by tomorrow morning.”

To Ayako’s encouragement, Tatsuya replied with that.

Chapter 13

Gu Jie was currently hiding in downtown Hiratsuka. In order to surround their target while avoiding detection, as well as to keep the local residents from becoming anxious, Katsuto, as the head of the Gu Jie capture party, limited the number of people in his party as he secretly deployed them in order to advance.

However, the enemy could sense their movements. By 'enemy' this was not referring to Gu Jie, but rather, another force that was aiding his escape.

"Major, we've confirmed that the combined Magician and Police forces lead by Juumonji Katsuto has started sending personnel into Hiratsuka. It seems that the Japanese magicians have also pinpointed Heigu's secret location."

"So, they're bringing the police in, as well. It appears that the Japanese side wants to apprehend Heigu."

Benjamin Canopus was recognized as the No.2, after the General Officer and leader of 'The STARS' Angie Sirius. He is the UNSA's Joint Chief of Staff with direct supervision over 'The STARS', and leads them as their commanding officer. He received the report from his men who were stationed in a mobile base disguised as a trailer, and returned from unanswerable soliloquy.

They were not First-Class STARS members. For this operation, aside from Canopus, there were no regular STARS members being commissioned. Terrorist escape assistance — or more accurately, capture interference — and assassination. Because of this operation's extreme illegality, compared to last year's operation dealing with the disposal of the runaway soldiers, the importance to leave no evidence of their involvement was stressed.

At Zama, their location was next to the joint base and thus had convenient conditions to be able to use soldiers. Unfortunately that wouldn't work in this case. This time, the men Canopus was leading were composed of soldiers with an East Asian appearance employed by the military intelligence department as a group for subversive actions.

They were of a disposition similar to that of Stardust. Like the Stardust that couldn't become STARS, all members were taking drugs that exchanged their life span for increased ability. They were disposable enhanced soldiers.

The percentage of those that were and were not magicians was 50:50. Among those that didn't possess magical abilities were those who had received biochemical and mechanical strengthening measures. Their ability was not to the same degree as the fully mechanized cyborgs who appeared with special effects on entertainment channels, but their ability to slip in with the citizens and perform their subversive activities was not inferior to that of the magicians.

They are a tough group of combatants who feared no law and had no morals, yet Canopus managed to completely command them once he showed his power.

“In accordance with the simulation, obstruct the capture of Heigu.”

To the anticipating temporary forces, Canopus incisively passed these orders.

With technology that the Japanese side didn't possess, Canopus' forces had a continuous grasp on the whereabouts of Jiedo Heigu, or Gu Jie. As well as having full knowledge of the state of affairs in Gu Jie's vicinity, they had thoroughly investigated and arranged an anticipated escape route. The fact that this was a foreign country was of no handicap to them. The advantages and disadvantages of home and away were rather instead reversed.

In accordance with Canopus' orders, the group of illegal covert operatives immediately commenced their mobilization. Canopus himself was personally heading towards the destroyer waiting on standby in international waters.



Since he had entered the country, Gu Jie had been mostly moving between his hiding locations by himself. He had relied on some old friends who had offered him refuge, but he had also procured guards and troops to be used for disturbances, on the fly.

If the amount of people he had a connection with increased, that alone would make it easier for intelligence on him to leak. So, Gu Jie kept the amount of people he had contact with to a minimum, and if he felt those companions were ever being traced, he'd immediately deal with them to evade the Japanese magician's pursuit. To Gu Jie, a “blood companion” possessed that degree of reliability and merit.

However, it was finally the moment to escape from Japan, and Gu Jie could no longer make arrangements by himself.

First, for the means of departure, the freighter he used to smuggle himself into the country was going to remain as a decoy, until the very end. In actuality, the ship was under ownership of the remnants of No Head Dragon for the purpose of smuggling. However, that had been an unexpectedly rough passage.

Gu Jie had supported Richard Sun and created the organization No Head Dragon, but in the Summer of 2095, the organization was temporarily destroyed by a joint operation of the USNA and Japan. (On that occasion, the Great Asian Union tacitly consented to the actions of Japan and the USNA) Afterwards, the remnants of the organization accepted the only daughter of Richard Sun who was commuting to a university in California as the head, and started rebuilding the organization. The problem was that daughter's name was Sun Meilin. As a law in effect for the new organization, she forbade any hostility in Japan. She would overlook smuggling, but those that ignored her orders and engaged in illegal drug transactions or human trafficking would be given no mercy and subsequently be purged.

In the organization, it wasn't like there were only a few members who held antipathy towards the weak stance they had in Japan, but for the young female head who wanted, in the short term, to remake the once already destroyed organization and produce reliable fruits of labor. For now most of the members were made to understand to wait and see, and so publicly pledged their allegiance. Gu Jie however, was found as considerably uncooperative.

"Lord Heigu, it's Doe. Would it be fine if I entered?"

Under such circumstances, the mediator he had found last week was this person by the name of Doe. During the incident when the Japanese magicians had raided in Zama, Doe was the man who had operated the escape ambulance. In addition, Heigu was the codename used for Gu Jie by No Head Dragon, and he himself had ordered Doe to call him such.

"Enter."

Gu Jie had no faith in Doe. In Zama he had run out of time, so he was forced to rely on him, but the timing of it was too good to be true. And besides, the

name Joe Doe was a hoax. “Joe” was “John”, and was an abbreviation for “John Doe” used for unidentified bodies or suspects, and as someone who had lived in the USNA, Gu Jie naturally knew.

“Lord, the ship’s arrangements have been completed.”

“Is that so.”

However, despite his suspiciousness, he had no choice but to make use of this man. Gu Jie was emotionally cornered to that extent.

Early this morning, he had suddenly felt a mysterious glance aimed at him. Gu Jie had concluded that it was a Japanese practitioner's investigation magic meant to search for him. But what kind of magic or to what degree of accurate information it could get, Gu Jie didn’t know.

However, he believed that he was certainly apprehended by a Japanese magician, and most likely by someone in the Ten Master Clans.

He couldn’t help but be impatient.

He was currently within the midst of the enemy territory. At this rate, his revenge would be killed off halfway.

Gu Jie was more or less taking a risk, but he took leaving Japan as quickly as possible as his priority.

“We’re departing immediately.”

“I’ll lead the way.”

He was already finished packing. Naturally, his luggage was not normal by any means; money and curse tools. He held the curse tools himself, and the paper and electronic currencies from various countries were kept inside of a satchel held by the former policeman as Gu Jie followed after Doe’s back.

◇ ◇ ◇

6:00 P.M. The cloudy winter sky was completely dark. In contrast, artificial light was flooding the street.

The proportion of those telecommuting at home was on the rise, and the term ‘commuter town’ was in the process of becoming a dead phrase.

Simultaneously, compared to a century earlier, with the development of high speed traffic networks, metropolis business regions were rapidly expanding. For example, it's become to the same degree as the feeling of 'shopping a bit in front of the station'. Compared to the olden days, in the surrounding urban areas of the Metropolis business regions, night instead came much quicker.

But even so, at 6 P.M. it was still a time with many pedestrians. It was too early to commence a fight in the urban areas.

"Gu Jie has started to move. He has three fellow companions."

In response to the report given by the Saegusa's subordinate magician, the eldest son of the Saegusa Family Saegusa Tomokazu replied in agreement with one word, "Understood".

This year, Tomokazu was a man turning 27 years old. From an outward appearance, Tomokazu took after his father Kouichi (however, he wasn't wearing sunglasses like his father). His magic ability was inferior to his brother Koujiro who was 3 years younger, and was roughly the same level as Mayumi. His skillfulness however, exceeded both his younger brother and sister. He lacked cunningness like his father, but he held a reputation for his organization, management and reliability of which Tomokazu already exceeded his father Kouichi's reputation in that regard. He had a diligent personality without the same toxicity that Kouichi had.

In other words, he was the type that was "capable but not interesting".

He might be unattractive as a friend, but is a very reliable business partner.

"Juumonji-dono. Shall we allow the police officers we've brought to also commence their interrogations?"

For tonight's operation, Mayumi was not participating. For this matter the Saegusa Family member in charge was Tomokazu. In this final operation, it was natural that he would be commanding for the Saegusa Family, but the reason that Mayumi wasn't there was not from Tomokazu's aversion for his younger sister to be involved in this dangerous mission, but from some other ulterior motive. He loved his sister, but that was not the reason. It was that he would not let a woman behave in such a dangerous manner. Tomokazu was, compared to his father, certainly much more sensible.

However, he didn't seem to be blessed with a good sense for roughness.

"...Wouldn't that be a bit dangerous?"

To Kouichi's proposal, Katsuto gently repudiated.

"I don't think our opponent will obediently abide any orders given by the police. Even if we were to peacefully commence, there would only be more victims from a counterattack, and it would end in uneasy urban fighting."

The reason Tomokazu didn't say to suddenly commence the operation was the result of his consideration to not be criticized afterwards for overreaching the authority of the Ten Master Clans. However, he didn't think too deeply about the possibility of the enemy strength exceeding their estimations, or the damage that would occur if such a situation were to happen.

"So Juumonji-dono is seeking to completely avoid urban fighting then?"

"Once the pedestrian traffic has diminished, then I believe it'll be possible to go with a more aggressive plan."

Katsuto had recognized his own miscalculation. He assumed that the target would start moving once it had started to get late.

"Saegusa-dono, I believe the enemy is heading towards the fishing harbor near the mouth of Sagami River, or just a bit further to the new port."

"So, does that mean he's formed some sort of plan to escape by sea then?"

"Yes. I heard the terror mastermind also smuggled himself into the country on a small freighter. He may be planning to use a small boat from the coast, and then change onto an ocean-going vessel anchored offshore."

"Well then, shall we split the capture team into two then? We can have Ichijou-dono and Yotsuba-dono go on ahead to the new port, and Juumonji-dono and I shall bring along the police and pursue after the target's car."

Katsuto felt that Tomokazu's plan had a bad balance. Tatsuya hadn't brought any Yotsuba subordinates with him. The Ichijou Family subordinates Masaki had brought with him had already been deployed to block the north side route of retreat.

"I'll provide men from my family to assist Ichijou-dono and Yotsuba-dono.

However, it will leave us with only one party on this side, but if you don't mind."

To Tomokazu, this wasn't a bad proposal. It had two benefits. One being that a group went ahead, the other and more important benefit was that the pursuant group had a higher chance of capturing the target.

Aside from Katsuto, if all members were Saegusa followers, then the merit of capturing the terrorist would go mostly to the Saegusa Family.

The honor of the Saegusa Family would then greatly recover.

"...Is that so. I have no objections."

"Then let's go with that."

Katsuto brought out a communication device and called Tatsuya and Masaki.

◇ ◇ ◇

"The Japanese magicians have caught on to us."

The former Japanese policeman was driving, and in the back seat, Gu Jie immediately noticed a tail of vehicles.

The distance to their destination wasn't much farther. Or rather, it was short. Just by changing routes it would be impossible to shake off their pursuers.

"There's no need to worry."

Doe turned around and spoke out to Gu Jie in the back seat, who had been planning on using the dead soldiers he had prepared in advance to intercept.

"Their pursuit is within our range of expectations. We have measures for this."

Immediately when he finished speaking.

From the rear of their car, a showy blaze had risen. The blaze did not consist of one explosion, but roared off a succession of explosions.

"It's... not a grenade. It's not carrying missiles either. Is it a continuous sequence grenade launcher?"

"Your discernment is correct, my Lord. However, despite them being taken by surprise, everything is being blocked by a shield, it seems the rumored Juumonji

magician may have directly joined in the pursuit.”

“It’s not shaking them off. What should we do?”

Exactly as Gu Jie said, from inside the dispersing blaze the undamaged pursuit vehicles increased their speed and continued forward.

“There’s no need to be concerned.”

Doe’s face contained no traces of panic.

On one side of the two-lane highway, though surprised by the sound of explosions thus dropping their speed, the leading cars were still in pursuit and crossed the divider. On this side of the highway the vehicles were disconnected from traffic control. Even still, driving here was still supported by the automatic driving features of the vehicles.

Still, the trailing vehicles pursuing the vehicle Gu Jie was in were obviously breaking traffic laws. The leading pursuers were facing the oncoming traffic, which had started to go through their risk avoidance program as they approached and stopped on the shoulder of the road.

With the road lanes open, the pursuant vehicles raised their speed even more and cut across the intersection. Just at that moment, an automobile that had run through the light suddenly emerged from the side and blocked the way.

Now if this was a trailer or a large truck, then the pursuant vehicles would have either noticed and stopped or would have taken evasive actions. However, in the middle of the intersection, the large automobile, which had suddenly stopped had both its headlights and beacon off, had turned into a barricade.

Even the shrieking of the emergency brakes was in vain, as the vehicles pursuing Gu Jie collided with an intense force into the vehicle which had suddenly emerged from the side.



By the time Katsuto, hot in pursuit of Gu Jie’s vehicle, noticed the suspicious van from behind, a grenade had already been fired at them.

Katsuto’s vehicle was set up as the rear guard of the four-vehicle pursuit team. It was a stroke of luck that the team was set up this way. With Katsuto’s

magic barrier, the grenades would not reach their target.

“Saegusa-dono, the current situation does not allow us to worry about the public.”

Katsuto informed Tomokazu, who was in one of the vehicles ahead, via the communicator.

“I will take care of the suspicious vehicle behind us, please apprehend Gu Jie.”

“Understood. Juumonji-dono, I leave the rear to you.”

While communicating with Tomokazu, Katsuto ordered the driver to stop.

The driver of the vehicle was a magician, specifically a subordinate of the Saegusa Family. Although he wasn't a member of the Juumonji faction, nor was he a subordinate under Katsuto, the driver didn't think twice about bringing the vehicle to a full stop at Katsuto's command.

Katsuto stepped out of the vehicle onto the road.

The van that had been bombarding the pursuit vehicles slid to a halt. The van's side was now facing Katsuto.

It was uncertain whether Katsuto was aware that there was no human presence behind the launcher muzzle that was sticking out of the window.

Katsuto extended his right hand forward.

A silent and unlit grenade was launched, but it was immediately blocked by the Anti-Matter Heat Retaining Barrier erected by Katsuto.

Katsuto held his right arm in the same position and switched to attacking the van.

In the next instance, the van was crushed.

The sunroof of the vehicle was crushed inwards, while the barrel of the grenade launcher that was caught between the roof and the door frame was completely deformed. However, there was no explosion. It was not certain whether it was because the grenade launcher was empty or if the safety mechanism of the grenade launcher prevented it from exploding, but the overturned van did not catch fire.

Katsuto maintained the square barrier formation and used magic to jump towards the van. He landed next to the vehicle and confirmed the situation.

There was no one in the van.

Behind Katsuto, who was attentively inspecting the van, from the direction of Tomokazu and crew came a violent sound of collision that shook his eardrums.

Katsuto turned and utilized movement magic to return to his own vehicle, then he raced towards the scene of the accident.

The front of the car that Tomokazu was riding in had been smashed, but the chassis was undamaged. Although the safety design of the vehicle must have contributed, it was most likely Tomokazu's quick response that ensured his self-perseveration.

Unfortunately, the other two cars did not protect themselves in time. The police cars took heavy damage. On the other hand, it was the safety design of the vehicle that saved the occupants inside. Fortunately, the size of the vehicles blocking the road was about the same size as the overturned vehicles.

"Saegusa-dono, are you alright?"

Katsuto glanced through the window and asked. Tomokazu smiled as if mocking himself.

"Um, my body is alright, there are no injuries."

Once the rapid 'Kacha Kacha' noise stopped, the back door of the vehicle finally opened. Tomokazu took his time to get out of the car because he had spent quite a bit of effort switching from the automatic lock on the car to a manual one.

"Tomokazu-dono, are you free to see what the situation is with the police's side?"

After Katsuto saw that Tomokazu nodded in response, he walked towards the vehicles that were blocking the road.

The large self-driving car that had become a roadblock was struck several times. Thus the three vehicles blocking the intersection were then hit by their cars from the side. One of the vehicles had overturned from the collision, while

another had lost its tires from the impact and its chassis was directly sitting on the road. The last vehicle had its rear seats crushed in by the front end of another car, turning into scrap metal.

Katsuto readied himself to release the Square barrier formation at any time and turned his attention to the interior of the vehicles helping Gu Jie's escape.

Just like the interior of the van from earlier, all three vehicles had no occupants.

All obstructing vehicles were self-driving vehicles.

With such well-coordinated preparation, Katsuto began to be suspicious.

If the opposition had preparation to such magnitude, Gu Jie should have escaped Japan already.

"Juumonji-dono."

Tomokazu's call interrupted Katsuto's chain of thought.

Tomokazu was already by his side.

"Tomokazu-dono, what's the situation?"

Katsuto inquired about the police officers' injuries first.

"Nothing fatal. I already used healing magic to treat them, but we still need to call an ambulance. With the current situation, there was no way to keep pursuing with everyone. Especially since our cars are like this."

Tomokazu said with a discouraged look at the wreck.

"Juumonji-dono please continue pursuing the terrorist. I will send ground units towards the escape route to intercept and meet up with you."

Was this arrangement from the Saegusa Family really alright? Katsuto almost asked this out loud, but quickly dismissed the thought. The betrayal of the current head of the Saegusa Family Kouichi had always lingered in Katsuto's mind, but this was a bias created by the impression Katsuto had of Kouichi. Saegusa Tomokazu was someone who placed his country and the Japanese Magic Society's interest as precedence.

"Even though I think there won't be any more surprise attacks, please be

careful Saegusa-dono.”

“Juumonji-dono, please take care.”

Katsuto used magic to remove the enemy’s vehicle that was blocking the road. Once he was sure the road was cleared, Katsuto returned to his own vehicle.

◇ ◇ ◇

Tatsuya and Masaki, who were riding motorcycles, lead two sedans and arrived at the new port at the mouth of the Sagami River.

Both vehicles had five accompanying magicians. Juumonji Family magicians were known for their abilities as a ‘one-man army’. They were known to have considerable combat power.

Tatsuya and Masaki stopped their bikes side by side and stood at the entrance of the new port. Four boats were parked at the new port that was surrounded by embankments. These boats were designed to only be used near the coast.

“Perhaps they will switch once they are out on the sea...”

“Possibly.”

Tatsuya responded normally to Masaki’s mumbling.

As if he had been surprised, Masaki felt a bit embarrassed.

“Shiba, do you know Gu Jie’s position?”

He asked Tatsuya in a slightly sharp tone.

“Coming towards this direction.”

However, Tatsuya chose not to point that out. He takes no pleasure in teasing the same gender.

“As predicted.”

The two that had sent them here, Katsuto and Tomokazu, had predicted correctly. Masaki thought so, at the same time, the upcoming battle made him tremble in excitement.

Masaki was unsure how Tatsuya was tracking Gu Jie’s position, but he did not

doubt Tatsuya's words. Tatsuya's actions so far was enough to make Masaki trust him.

If Tatsuya was correct, the achievement for capturing the mastermind of the terrorist attack would go to Masaki who was waiting in ambush — though more correctly it would go to both he and Shiba Tatsuya — to be exact. Once Masaki thought of this, he was excited.

“How long till?”

“Soon... No!”

Tatsuya quickly finished, stepping on to his own bike.

“Gu Jie changed course to the west! Ichijou, let's go after him!”

“Understood!”

Not long after Tatsuya left, Masaki throttled his acceleration. Since the bike was both front and rear wheel drive, the front wheel did not lift up because of the hasty start. Tatsuya and Masaki rode West towards the main road that was parallel to the coastline.

One car was driving in front of them. Without Tatsuya informing him, Masaki knew that Gu Jie was on the vehicle.

He accelerated to reach Tatsuya's side.

Just as he was parallel to Tatsuya, Tatsuya suddenly stopped accelerating and jumped off his bike.

Masaki reflexively steered his bike away from Tatsuya's bike.

He used his brakes in a hurry, drifting to turn his bike. The automatic balancing mechanism fixed the bike's posture autonomously, as if matching Masaki's intentions, Tatsuya's bike was located in the front of his field of view.

Tatsuya's motorcycle was split in two by the mid-air attack.

◇ ◇ ◇

Contrary to Gu Jie's expectation, Doe did not head towards the new port but instead drove along the main road heading west.

“Are we not heading towards the new port?”

“The enemy should be anticipating that. We will head towards the sea via a different route.”

Seems like Doe had made preparations beyond Gu Jie’s imagination. Gu Jie was worried that the enemy would ambush at the port, but since they can avoid this risk, he did not object.

“... The enemy’s response is faster than we imagined. They probably have a powerful Sensory Type magician on their side.”

Not long after turning onto the main road, Doe looked at his rearview mirror and bit his lip. (The vehicle that Gu Jie was riding in was the type that could be driven by both front passengers.) Gu Jie turned around and looked.

The headlights from two motorcycles and two cars were in pursuit and closing the distance on them.

“Who is responsible for intercepting?”

“Lord, deepest apologies, I had them set up in a place further ahead.”

Gu Jie did not express displeasure. He was not trying to conceal his attitude. Discovering a flaw in this man that was over prepared had him breathe a sigh of relief.

“If the situation continues they will catch up.”

“Let me drive, I will throw them off.”

“No, there’s no need.”

Gu Jie turned towards the corpse soldier and let out a command.

“Go and kill them.”

The rear sunroof opened, the corpse soldier carried the magic invoked katana. He held the cane sword in his hand and rushed out of the vehicle.



Just like that, he had attacked the leading motorcycle. He drew his sword from the cane in midair and struck towards the motorcycle, splitting it in two.

◇ ◇ ◇

Tatsuya jumped off the motorcycle and landed on the road, maintaining his stance as he touched down. This was due to him using magic to control his position. He watched his favorite motorcycle split into two.

Precisely speaking, he watched a katana split his favorite vehicle in half, contrary to the common sense of an assassin.

Juumonji magician's vehicle came over in pursuit.

They had originally planned to stop their vehicle and then battle, but Tatsuya yelled first.

"Ichijou, go pursuit Gu Jie! You guys as well, continue the pursuit!"

An enemy wielding a katana — probably a sword-shaped armament device, directed killing intent towards Masaki. But before this enemy began his attack, he had jumped widely to the side. A short blade fell from the sky at very high speeds, stabbing the ground where he had been standing.

The short blade did not fall down naturally. It was a movement type acceleration magic that shot the blade out in an arch. It was Tatsuya's attack.

"Go! I will take care of this."

"We will rely on you!"

Tatsuya held off the enemy.

Masaki and Juumonji squad continued to chase down Gu Jie.

Tatsuya stopped impeding the enemy and changed to a battle stance.

His weapons of choice today were fully thought-operated CADs. On his wrists were the thought-operated bracelet shaped CADs.

There was an automatic pistol holstered near his chest.

His waist bag contained two knives attached with padded fist guards. One of those knives was stabbed on the road.

Tatsuya used movement-type magic to pull the knife back into his hand. Using his left hand to wield the knife, his right hand would be ready to draw his pistol anytime.

The katana wielding man glared towards Tatsuya with the attitude to face him directly. Without a blade guard, it was most likely a cane sword.

The man faced Tatsuya, the dimly lit street lights exposed the man's face.

Tatsuya had an impression to who this face belonged to.

"Detective Chiba Toshikazu!?"

A pale white face, as though he was wearing a mask showing no emotions. However, looking at his figure and attitude, it was definitely Erika's oldest brother Chiba Toshikazu.

“The Eldest son of the Hundred Families' Chiba Family, why are you standing on the side of the terrorists!?”

The other party did not answer.

His reply was not through words, but rather through action.

Toshikazu attacked Tatsuya with sword techniques.

Optimized, therefore the simplest and fastest.

A sword style brought to the point of perfection. Even Tatsuya could only evade without energy to spare.

Tatsuya jumped backwards substantially to widen the distance. He intended to avoid the opposition's combination techniques.

However, Toshikazu followed Tatsuya and rushed over.

The speed of these attacks was one of the highest tier that Tatsuya had faced to date.

However, it was not 'something unheard of' thus it did not reach a level where he could not handle.

Tatsuya looked at Toshikazu's release of Psion.

Proceeded to cancel the self-acceleration magic with Gram Demolition.

Toshikazu's dash acceleration became slower; however, this was only for one instant.

Toshikazu's body filled with Psion. Using the same speed from before the activation of Gram Demolition, he attacked Tatsuya once more.

However, Tatsuya had used that instant of delay to escape from the attack range.

Tatsuya had wanted to ask 'Why are you on the side of the terrorists?' again, but he realized this question was insignificant now.

That was because he read Toshikazu's Eidos.

(Dead? That's not right.....)

Toshikazu ran along the surface of the asphalt road and jumped towards Tatsuya.

Tatsuya aimed towards his leg and attacked with Partial Decomposition.

The same instance that Tatsuya released his magic, Toshikazu also set himself firmly on the ground, raised his katana and struck downwards.

A soundless explosion. The released flash was not in a wavelength that could be discerned by the naked eye.

Toshikazu's entire body released compressed Psions.

A magic that could disable others' magic that was applied to his body, Gram Demolition.

Tatsuya could not contain his shock. However, he was not surprised that Toshikazu could use Gram Demolition.

Tatsuya had never heard that the eldest son of the Chiba Family was capable of using Gram Demolition. It was not just Tatsuya, but there has never been such rumor.

If it was only this, then it could be thought of as Chiba Family keeping their eldest son's skill a secret.

Tatsuya used decomposition once again. The target was the ankle, shoulder and blade.

Toshikazu's body released a large amount of Psions three times, consequently, his existence became thinner.

(Exchanged his existence information into Psions?)

A fact that had originally been impossible to happen had left Tatsuya in shock. Misappropriation of information was equivalent to annihilating oneself. Conscious creatures would never be able to do such a thing to themselves. Moreover, the Eidos that recorded the existence of the body did not provide enough Psions to be used to activate Gram Demolition.

Tatsuya wrapped 'Decomposition' on the blade and received Toshikazu's attack. This magic was using the blade to decompose matter on contact, it also ignored the material, it would look as though the knife had severed the material.

However, Toshikazu's katana withstood Tatsuya's magic.

(Was the katana also defined as a single entity?)

The instant Tatsuya's magic activation area, which was also the tip of the knife, contacted Toshikazu's katana, the information regarding Decomposition's failure to activate was sent into Tatsuya's consciousness.

The reason was due to Chiba Family's secret sword technique 'Tetsuzan'. This magic did not treat a sword as steel or iron crafted object, but rather defined the 'blade' as the only concept. This allowed the blade to follow a slashing motion path set by a Magic Sequence, belonging to the Movement Type Magic category. Since magic temporarily defined it as the only concept, there was no other constituent that it could further decompose into.

Magic that had failed to activate originally would immediately dissipate due to flaws in its definition. However, Tatsuya's Decomposition magic area was extremely small, thus he was able to maintain it.

One second.

Steel crashed together.

Two seconds.

Katana and knife mutually resisted the force of each other.

Three seconds.

Then, without a sound.

Tatsuya's knife severed Toshikazu's katana.

The blade of a sword was made up of countless polymers of metal molecules, the main component being iron. A magic that disguises it as a 'single entity' could not be maintained forever. 'Tetsuzan' was originally a magic sword technique that would slash through a target instantly. Toshikazu's 'Tetsuzan' lost its effect before Tatsuya's 'Decomposition'.

The blade was severed without any resistance. Toshikazu had slashed with his full force; thus, his body was leaning forward. However, Tatsuya had no opportunity to counter attack. Toshikazu purposely dashed towards Tatsuya, reducing the distance to where knives and fists could not attack.

Tatsuya circled to the back of Toshikazu.

Toshikazu waved the halved length katana around and impeded Tatsuya.

Tatsuya did not attack carelessly, but backed off instead.

Analyzing the opponent's information collected by his 'eyes'.

Chiba Toshikazu's existence felt weaker.

(Could it be, he was exchanging 'life force' for magic power?)

Tatsuya was not aware that such a technique existed. In addition, current science — including magic — could not confirm the existence of 'life force'.

But the existence of this energy was mainly considered 'confirmed' in the field of ancient magic. Tatsuya frequently heard Yakumo mention this. During the Parasite Incident, Mikihiro also used 'seiki' to describe this energy. He said magical beings did not absorb flesh and blood, but instead absorbed 'seiki' as nutrients.

If Gu Jie possessed a magic technique that could utilize life force, then the question from before could be answered.

The dead without death. Just like an Eidos in the process of death.

If you consider the living to have life force, then the dead are those who have lost that life force. The act of 'killing' the living would release that life force. If one managed to pool that surplus energy and use it as magical power, it would change into the state of a 'living corpse'. The body, once emptied of this surplus, would become a 'true corpse'.

The mystery of Toshikazu utilizing Gram Demolition that he was not originally able to use could only be explained by the exchange of life force.

His existence information was waning. If it was regarded as the process of the gradual disappearance of the 'information body of life', then it could be understood.

Not only was it a corpse, but magic used to fool around with one's life was unpardonably evil.

Tatsuya admits that magic does not have a holy or evil distinction. After all that was said and done, it was the 'ability' used by humans. Good and evil was determined according to the results of those actions. On top of that, this was judged by human values. There was no absolute righteousness or evil. This was his thoughts.

However, at this moment, he violated his own philosophy. He felt that Gu Jie's magic was evil. He should not trample humans, trample magicians to this level. Generators and Sorcery Boosters have already spurred disgust, but this magic made Tatsuya hold unconditional rejection and resistance.

Tatsuya was furious.

"Chiba Toshikazu!"

Tatsuya yelled out the name of the swordsman who was already dead.

"Are you conscious!? Can you understand me!?"

Toshikazu did not respond.

He threw away the katana that only had half a blade remaining and drew out the Tachi from his back without uttering a word.

"Chiba Toshikazu! That is your name. It is a name that represents who you are!"

Witnessing this scene, Tatsuya continued to yell at Toshikazu.

This behavior was not Tatsuya's style.

Toshikazu's katana aimed towards Tatsuya with a clear intention of engaging in combative action. Before, Tatsuya would have already engaged in countering. Even if he knew that the opposition was being controlled, 'protecting' only came after completely removing the enemy's combative capabilities. This was Tatsuya's style.

Tatsuya, nevertheless, requested a conversation with his opponent before actual combat. He was well aware that the opposition was dead. The chance for him to respond was close to zero, but he had still requested.

Toshikazu did not respond to Tatsuya. Or, to be exact, could not respond.

Instead, he slashed at Tatsuya.

Tatsuya did not receive the vicious attack with his knife, but instead he dodged these attacks by sidestepping.

Compared to the defense of the attack earlier, Tatsuya felt more relaxed this time. He felt that Toshikazu's sword swipes were a bit rough. It seemed that the Tachi had a higher curvature which was not as suitable for Toshikazu.

The Chiba Family was also known as the "Magic Swordsman". The eldest son would never carry a weapon that was not suited for himself.

This was probably given to him from a third party, most likely a weapon given to him by Gu Jie. It was not a "Yanagi Blade" that belonged to the wider type of blade that you would get from China, but was a tachi that was popular during the Northern and Southern dynasties. It was probably prepared by the collaborator within the country.

Tatsuya was not familiar with swords. Although he had trained with Uchigatana and Odachi while practicing martial arts, he had never studied the history and artistic value of weapons.

Though this was the case, Tatsuya seemed to have noticed that Toshikazu's Tachi was shaped strangely. The blade was clearly curved, as if it had been curved from an arc mold. The shaft was made of metal, with rounded corners at both ends. Looking at the handle, it was similar to the 'Kenukigatatachi' style from after the Peaceful Period.

Tatsuya was only able to observe the Tachi up to that point. It was limited by the short time of Toshikazu stabilizing his body, just before he attacked again. Tatsuya was not only strong in magic vision, but his visual acuity was also very strong. However, he was not an expert in sword identification, he did not know the crucial points for katana analysis.

Tatsuya used his knife to block the tip of the Tachi that was swept over horizontally. Though the strength of this part was the strongest, Tatsuya used the blade's arc to cause the knife to slide. He escaped Toshikazu's attack distance as if he had been pushed away.

Tatsuya used flash cast to activate inertia neutralization magic to aid his own retreat, while speculating that the Tachi was a magic tool. It was probably not remodeled from an existing Tachi, but was crafted by the collaborator of Gu Jie. The effect was probably to adversely affect wounds or something.

If he could 'see' more details, then he could analyze what magic the blade activated. However, Tatsuya did not have that much time to spare.

Tatsuya tried to use 'Mist Dispersion' on the Tachi. The target was not the magic set within the Tachi, but the Tachi itself. He purposely tried to avoid contact with the magic that had not activated to prevent any unexpected side effects.

At the instant that Tatsuya activated his magic, Toshikazu held the Tachi directly to the front. He was not reacting to Tatsuya's use of magic, since he would not have reacted in time. It was probably a muscle memory battle technique in dealing with magicians.

The Tachi released compressed Psions that blew away Tatsuya's Mist Dispersion Magic Sequence.

Magic was Systemic in characteristic; the Magic Sequence was exposed.

Even if it was Tatsuya's magic, it could not escape this fate.

With the magic that was his forte was rendered ineffective, Tatsuya rushed to the front of Toshikazu.

Unknowingly, not only his left hand, but his right hand also held a knife attached with padded fist guards.

Tatsuya's swept his left hand horizontally.

The blade of the knife, while releasing Psions, passed through the base of the Tachi.

The body of the Tachi was severed, leaving only the hilt.

Toshikazu, who had just blown away Mist Dispersion, could not have rendered Decomposition ineffective. The counter magic set within his body, could not keep up with Tatsuya's speed in his continuous activation of his forte magic.

The blade fell to asphalt surface. Just before this, Tatsuya's right fist which was covered by padded fist guards hit Toshikazu's chest.

Toshikazu, who received a heavy blow to the ribs, had fallen towards the road. Tatsuya's hand did not feel any bones breaking upon impact. However, it would not be a surprise if a normal person receiving such an attack fainted.

While his body fell towards the ground, Toshikazu did a backflip. He was now kneeling on one leg. However, he did not stand up again. It would seem that the nearly dead body could still receive trauma.

“Chiba Toshikazu!”

At this time, Tatsuya continued to do something uncharacteristic of him.

He continued to yell at Toshikazu.

“Do you not know this name? Do you not know who you are anymore?”

‘Death’ could not be overturned by ‘Life’. Even Tatsuya's ‘Regrowth’ could not revive the dead.

Then, what is the boundary between life and death?

The brain stops working? The heart stops beating? Metabolism stops working? Or was it having no soul?

In Tatsuya's ‘Eyes’, Toshikazu ‘looked’ dead.

At that same time, Toshikazu also used magic stemming from his life force. Tatsuya's ‘eyes’ definitely ‘saw’ that his magic was not fed from an external source. It was produced internally.

If he did not completely die, then maybe he could be revived with ‘Regrowth’.

Even if he did not completely die, if he continued to attack then maybe his death would be inevitable.

Furthermore, right now there was no time to spare for a detailed analysis. Gu Jie was on the run.

Thus, Tatsuya shouted towards Toshikazu.

If Toshikazu had any self-awareness, then Tatsuya would avoid the fatal blow.

If Miyuki was here, then he would not need to worry about such things.

She could temporarily freeze him. Tatsuya, of course, did not regret this.

Miyuki's safety was the absolute priority over Chiba Toshikazu's life.

If his priorities were based on rationality, then this would not be a worrisome matter. Quickly disposing the enemy was the correct response. Besides, the current Chiba Toshikazu was not someone Tatsuya could deal with leniently.

“Answer me! If you are conscious, then answer me!”

Even so, Tatsuya did not want to kill Toshikazu.

What was considered ‘death’? What was considered ‘life’? Tatsuya sought such knowledge internally. If he let Toshikazu live on, he may be able to grasp a crucial clue into finding the answer.

However, despite the desire for such knowledge, Tatsuya could not accept a magician's life being expended in such a way.

Magicians used to be a tool of war.

Tatsuya had once thought of himself as such a tool.

Up until now, Tatsuya had taken so many lives that he would not be qualified to discuss the dignity of life.

Because no matter which method of death was the cause, or which method of killing was used, death is death.

Though at the very least.

You should die after resisting.

You should die while struggling.

You should die in fear.

You should die after giving in.

You should die after accepting the truth.

You should die after cursing at your unreasonable fate.

You should die in a state of unawareness, as though one was sleeping.

Death should only belong to the person who was dying.

Even if they were to die for others, even if they were to kill for others.

Even after death, their lives were exploited without respect, without feeling and then be killed once more, this was something that should absolutely never happen.

Even slaves have the freedom to die.

Even dead livestock were simply meat, simply bones, and simply materials. A lifeless object.

If lives were messed with, even after their death, simply for the exploit of magic, then magicians, as tools, were inferior to that of livestock.

Tatsuya could never agree with such things.

For Miyuki... In order to never let Miyuki bear the fate of a weapon, Tatsuya secretly prepared by himself, the method to allow magicians to live life beyond being weapons or tools. The way that he is, he could not agree with weaponizing magicians regardless of what was said to him.

“Chiba Toshikazu!”

In the end, Toshikazu never responded to Tatsuya’s words. He did not have this ‘function’ any longer.

Toshikazu stood up and took a sword stance with the severed Tachi.

The instant that Tatsuya followed suit in a fighting stance, Toshikazu’s body suddenly became bigger. Even Tatsuya’s motion vision could not keep up with the high-speed acceleration, resulting in an illusion.

In an instant, Tatsuya’s line of sight had lost track of Toshikazu.

Although it was said in such a way, he was only too late to focus on Toshikazu. His field of view was still able to capture Toshikazu’s silhouette.

He had, indeed, saw the enemy take action.

Toshikazu raised his right hand, the Tachi that had lost half its blade was ready to slash down on Tatsuya.

This slash would not hit its mark.

As if intuitively sensing the danger, Tatsuya used his knife to intercept the residual blade.

The Tachi that was held with one hand received strong repelling force causing the remaining blade to bounce upwards with the shaft head pointed downwards.

Toshikazu's left hand grasped the area close to the tip of the downwards facing shaft head.

Toshikazu used both hands to maintain the straight grip, he then stabbed towards the area underneath the left hand that Tatsuya used to hold his knife.

From a vertical slash, he had changed the course to a horizontal slash.

The Tachi that had lost most of its blade swept towards Tatsuya's body.

Tatsuya used his right fist, that was protected by padded fist guards, and punched towards the Tachi's blade edge.

"Gah!"

Blood shot out of Tatsuya's stomach. He could not help but cry out.

The jacket that possessed the bulletproof and anti-cut capabilities was easily torn. The exposed skin was sliced and teared open.

At the position that was almost touching skin, the leveled black line was camouflaged by the darkness of the night. Just above and below the black line a repulsion field that could slice through anything it touched was formed. This was the Weight Type Magic 'Pressure Slash'. This magic was originally applied to the tip of a blade or metal coil to activate a repulsion field. However, Toshikazu had activated it on the severed blade edge, extending the repulsion field in the space that contained nothing.

Although he had blocked it before it came into contact with his body, the pressure force from the slash was still able to slice through skin, damaging the muscles underneath.

【Self-Restoration / Automatic Start.】

(Force stop Self-Restoration)

Tatsuya used his willpower to halt the automatic activation of Self-Restoration. He then used his mental fortitude to overcome the pain of his injuries, and constructed another magic.

Gram Dispersion.

Using Gram Dispersion to decompose the black slash line formed by the magic 'Pressure Slash'.

Tatsuya quickly followed up with the next magic activation.

Gram Dispersion.

Tatsuya had already 'seen' several instances of the magic that forcefully extracted Toshikazu's Psions and transformed it into Gram Demolition.

He would decompose that magic.

Tatsuya's 'eyes' discovered that Psions were concentrated in the center of Toshikazu's chest, where the heart resides.

Tatsuya ignored the tearing of his own wounds, and punched his left fist towards Toshikazu's heart.

Mist Dispersion.

A hole that pierced through Toshikazu's chest into his back appeared.

Toshikazu's body released Psion light. Psion dissipated gradually.



All four of his limbs lost strength. His legs crumbled and kneeled onto the ground; his body collapsed onto the side.

The magic that had been casted on Toshikazu, seemed to have used his heart as the medium for continuous activation.

A corpse that marched towards death, now became a complete corpse.

Life force could no longer be felt from the corpse.

Although he became a corpse, Toshikazu's hand never released the Tachi's shaft.

Tatsuya lowered his head and gazed at Toshikazu attentively. It was not known if he was having a moment of silence.

“Tatsuya-kun”

Somebody had suddenly called him from behind. Without sensing the opponent’s presence, he almost attacked that person.

Just before he threw the knife in his hand, he had realized the origins of the voice.

Tatsuya turned around and saw Yakumo smiling bitterly with his hands raised.

“I did not plan on scaring you. Ignoring this, would it not be better to treat your injuries first?”

After Tatsuya heard those words, he had finally remembered that sword wound to the side of his stomach.

The wound disappeared instantly. Not only the wound, even the blood that had been spilt and the clothing that had been sliced open were restored.

“Every time I would think, this ability is so convenient...”

Yakumo was not being polite, but was actually envious.

“Master, why are you here?”

Yakumo’s reflections at this time was not important. Tatsuya ignored his master’s words and asked.

“Did I not say so this morning? I will help resolve this matter.”

Yakumo’s grin indescribably left Tatsuya angry, however, what he said was not wrong. Especially now that time was precious.

“Thank you. Then I will have to trouble Master with dealing with this body.”

Tatsuya did not waste anymore words. He then left the aftermath to Yakumo and immediately turned around.

“Oi, Tatsuya.”

Tatsuya ran away from the scene without saying another word.

Yakumo watched as Tatsuya’s back ran off into the distance. He then softly

muttered “Really now...” while shaking his head.

“Indeed, we cannot just leave this as is.”

Yakumo turned around.

In the darkness, several people dressed like monks appeared.

“Offer condolences to him.”

Yakumo’s disciples took Toshikazu’s body onto a stretcher. They then transported it into the van parked on the side of the road.

The van drove away towards the East. For some reason, there had been no vehicles passing by on this road. But suddenly the scene changed back to one of normality, with the occasional car passing by.



While Tatsuya was still hesitating over finishing off Tomokazu (his corpse), the vehicle Gu Jie was riding was arriving at its current destination.

“To the left just ahead!”

Doe was directing their path.

Their driver was the puppet Inagaki, who followed the instructions and weaved the car through an opening in the windbreak, and exited out on the beach.

In an agile movement, Doe exited from the vehicle and opened the door for Gu Jie sitting in the back seat.

“My Lord, we’re changing vehicles!”

Even Gu Jie could understand the reason Doe was in such a hurry.

From inside the windbreak forest, the headlights of the pursuing vehicles drew closer.

“Hold back the enemy here.”

Gu Jie ordered this to Inagaki’s body and followed behind Doe. Just in front of the beach, a box-wagon sized amphibious car was parked.

To Gu Jie’s rear, the sound of a gunshot rang out.

The sound was that of the corpse-puppet Inagaki, firing his gun at the pursuants who had made their appearance on the beach.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Major-dono, Heigu is about to be caught by the Japanese tracking force, please permit us to open fire.”

With the destroyer anchored in international waters as his destination, Canopus, who was passing the southern tip of peninsula received a request for instructions from the illegal special task force.

The current progression of events was not to his tastes. Canopus hoped to avoid a large-scale war with the Japanese. The decision to send troops here was already a political gamble.

The current mission was to avoid leaving official records of any type. Balance, who had tasked him with this mission, will pretend to know nothing when it is necessary.

If Doe, who had been assisting Gu Jie’s escape, had his identity revealed, it would be a huge scandal. Although Doe was an illegal special agent, and on the surface he had no relations to USNA, the military and the diplomats could not be naïve enough to believe in such an excuse.

If all the behind-the-scenes actions to assist Gu Jie’s escape was exposed, Canopus would not be able to leave unscathed. Not even his status as STARS Captain would do him any good. His identity would be eliminated. He would be declared dead to the world and he would be moved to completing illegal missions. To have a high-level magician who could be used to conduct destructive work, the military higher-ups would be rather optimistic instead.

Even so, the way things were now, handing Gu Jie over to the Japanese magicians, as in the Ten Master Clans, was no longer an option.

“Permission granted for use of live ammunition.”

“Understood.”

Canopus switched the communication mode of the terminal device to enemy search mode.

Referring to the ally-identified signal, he confirmed his current distance from the destroyer.

As long as they lure and assassinate Jiedo Heigu (Gu Jie) in international waters, this mission will be complete.

Even if they got to the result smoothly, recalling it afterwards would seem tasteless. Canopus, who had been thinking about this, sighed.

◇ ◇ ◇

As Masaki observed Gu Jie's vehicle driving into the path in the windbreaker, he thought: "Great!"

That path led to the beach. Due to the problems in dealing with the cleanup, Masaki had been reluctant to use 'Rupture'. But this place during this season, a beach in mid-winter, it shouldn't be a problem if he made a bigger disturbance.

Ships with a deep draft could not be used on the beach. If they had used an inflatable raft, then the beach would not be an obstacle. However, if this type of object got onto the beach, it would have been impossible to disguise. Gu Jie probably intended to ride the small ship further out into the ocean before transferring to an ocean liner. Getting off the vehicle and transferring to the ship would require a bit of time. Masaki thought that he could successfully apprehend Gu Jie at the time when he switched to the boat, even without damaging the ship.

Masaki passed through the windbreak that led the way to the beach and proceeded to dismount his bike. He would not continue to ride his urban motorcycle on the sand. The automobile overtook Masaki at his side, then he used movement-type magic to follow from behind.

The car that Gu Jie used as the escape vehicle stopped in the middle of the beach. The pursuing sedan passed by Gu Jie's vehicle.

Then, gunfire resounded.

The tires on the vehicle were pierced by the bullets.

The bullets easily penetrated in the bulletproof tires, so perhaps it was enhanced by magic with additional penetration force.

The sedan slid on the sand, and with much difficulty, it came to a halt without rolling over.

The sedan that was following the first braked just before they collided.

Ten magicians in total came out of the two vehicles. They came out directly without using the vehicles as a bunker.

Someone from Gu Jie's vehicle shot at the magicians.

The bullets that could penetrate the bulletproof tires were stopped by Anti-material shields.

(As expected of magicians under the Juumonji Family.)

Masaki sighed in silent admiration.

But he wasn't just observing the fight.

Masaki retrieved the bright red CAD from his holsters.

He activated 'Rupture' on Gu Jie's vehicle.

The car then caught fire. It was the enemy's bad luck that the car was an ethanol fueled model. When ignited, the ethanol gas fuel would cause an explosion.

A young man wearing a suit came out of the back of the burning vehicle. His right hand was holding a pistol type CAD, it was certain that he was the one who had opened fire.

Masaki decided to leave this man to the Juumonji magicians while he continued to pursue Gu Jie.

Juumonji Family magicians surround the young man — Inagaki.

However, Inagaki completely ignored the magicians who surrounded him and opened fire on Masaki.

The magician between Masaki and Inagaki blocked the bullets.

In the next instance, Inagaki rushed at the magician who had been using the Anti-material shield to protect Masaki.

As if he were thrusting a sword forward with the pistol, he pulled the trigger.

A dazzling Psion light was released with the bullet, and the sound released was unlike that of a pistol being fired.

The Anti-material shield was penetrated.

A Juumonji Family magician fell to the ground. There was a hole gaping open on his throat, and his neck was nearly snapped.

Without verifying, he was dead at the scene.

He had used a Kenjutsu with a pistol.

Masaki had never known about this technique, but he understood how dangerous it was just from seeing it.

Pointing the bright red CAD at Inagaki, Masaki pulled the trigger.

Inagaki's body shone with a brilliant Psion light.

Gram Dispersion had rendered Rupture a failure.

Masaki was shocked — but not stunned.

Although he was surprised, another part of his mind calmly constructed a magic sequence.

In the summer of 2095, after Masaki lost to Tatsuya in Monolith Code, he had been training for another battle. He trained repeatedly, while conducting many battle simulations, in order to deal with any strategy that Tatsuya could come up with.

One of which included countermeasures to Tatsuya's use of Gram Demolition.

Even if the magic failed because of Gram Demolition, he would have to immediately follow up with the next magic. As long as he prevented the opposition from having time to attack, sooner or later, they could not defend against the magic from this side.

This was the proposed countermeasure from Kichijouji after analyzing Gram Demolition's nature of having to release a large number of Psions.

Masaki had trained for this countermeasure in practice until it was drilled into his consciousness and became his body's reflex.

Just because Gram Demolition had paralyzed the magic attack once, it was

not enough to stop Masaki.

Masaki used 'Rupture' again.

In contrast, the magic sequence that Gu Jie implemented in Inagaki's body was not able to gather Psions fast enough.

The half-hearted Psion release was not enough to block Masaki's magic.

Inagaki's body tore open, with blood splattering everywhere.

Blood sprayed to where Masaki was. The blood was then slowly absorbed by the sand.

Masaki turned his body.

Their force had lost one person, and the enemy force had also lost one person.

Other than Gu Jie, there was one more. They both rode in the van.

No, rather, though it looked a van from the side, it could have been an amphibious vehicle.

In any case, there was no harm.

Masaki pointed the bright red CAD towards the vehicle.

The instant Masaki was about to pull the trigger, someone jumped him from behind.

He was knocked down onto the beach.

The person that had knocked him down was a member of the Juumonji Family magicians.

Why, he was about to ask.

As Masaki thought about this, gunfire resounded.

The magician protected Masaki while laying down, his Anti-material shield shaking.

A sound that was far greater than pistol gunfire resounded. Masaki had heard this sound before in the Yokohama Incident.

An Anti-magician, high-power rifle.

A bullet storm of high-power Anti-defense magic bullets rained down on them from the rear-end side of the windbreak.

Masaki speculated that the number of the enemy forces was twice their own.

As expected of elites brought by the Head of the Juumonji Family, who bore the alias, “Iron Wall,” they beautifully blocked the gunfire from the high-power rifle designed to kill magicians. But the quality and performance of the enemy’s weapons was that of the highest class, and from time-to-time, grenades would rain down from the sky, making them unable to focus their magic shields towards the direction of the windbreak.

The Juumonji Family magicians were completely focused on defense without any energy to spare.

(To have such high-performance equipment... perhaps Gu Jie had the support of the USNA military!?)

Though Masaki’s reasoning was hasty in coming to a conclusion, it was not wrong. Though the USNA government did not instigate Gu Jie to launch the terrorist attacks, the ones who had been attacking them were indeed USNA soldiers.

The van that housed Gu Jie rushed to the sea.

(So it really was an amphibious vehicle.)

Masaki pointed his CAD towards the amphibious vehicle while in a prone position.

But at this time, the enemy focused fire at him.

Masaki switched from ‘Rupture’ to activating an Anti-material shield magic. He was not using the all-round defensive type shield that the Juumonji Family magicians were using, but rather, a shield that was limited to the direction of the rifle’s shooting path.

Masaki left the grenades to the defense of Juumonji Family magicians, while he defended against the high-power rifle.

Without any spare time to attack the amphibious vehicle, Masaki was forced to temporarily focus on defense.



Katsuto's sedan drove into the path leading to the beach, according to the information he received from his subordinates.

Sounds of gunfire came from the front, mixed with sounds from explosions. There were not many residential buildings, but it was not an unmanned wilderness, and many cars still passed by. Although they were unsure of who would do such a thing, the fighting here was bold.

Katsuto's car was attacked by a hail of bullets, but Katsuto, who was well aware of the battle, had already prepared Anti-Material Shield magic to block the heavy, high-speed ammunition. The grenade that exploded on the ground ahead of the direction that his vehicle was moving towards was suppressed by Katsuto's magic.

Katsuto let the sedan stop in the windbreak.

He got off the vehicle alone.

Bullets came flying at Katsuto — he shielded himself against the bullets in his path and took off.

Katsuto's burly body was protected by a spherical shield while in flight.

Whether or not he broke branches or drilled past tree trunks, things were nullified as if they never existed. He flew towards the direction where the bullets were coming from.

The one who was most alarmed was the rifleman. He quickly aimed and fired the high-powered rifle at Katsuto in a frenzy, but the bullets bounced off the shield. The rifleman's face was hit by the shrapnel and could not help but freeze. An incredibly strong wall attacked him.

The gunman was sent flying by Katsuto's shield.

Katsuto was not satisfied with this.

The gunman crashed into the trunk of a tree and continued to collide with it. The shield was still wrapped around his body.

Pinned between the trunk of the tree and the shield wall, the gunman vomited blood.

Katsuto confirmed that the man was no longer responsive, he did not care whether the opposition was unconscious or dead, and began looking for the next target.

The motionless man sitting under the tree wore dark colored clothes that camouflaged him in the darkness of the night. At first glance, there were no items that could identify which organization he belonged to, however, the gun in his hand was not something that any common criminal organization could get their hands on. If the enemy belonged to a foreign army, then the battle earlier was undoubtedly challenging Japan's sovereignty. From the point of view of maintaining law and order, this was something that could not be overlooked.

Compared to apprehending Gu Jie, Katsuto decided to suppress the current gun battle first.

The hail of bullets weakened. Masaki, who actually felt this, finally became aware of the battle happening within the windbreak. A strong magical pressure was emitted from the windbreak. Masaki was familiar with this feeling.

In the summer of 2095, with the breathtaking sight of the last day of the Nine Schools Competition.

(Is Juumonji-dono in combat?)

Katsuto was currently battling and subduing enemies within the windbreak.

When Masaki realized this, he ran towards the windbreak instead of the ocean.

Instead of risking taking a bullet in the back while going after Gu Jie, he decided that he would spend a short amount of time taking care of these annoying people. Then, he could continue to pursue without worrying about his safety. Masaki thought that this was more reassuring.

He concentrated his shield to the front and rushed towards the hail of bullets.

In accordance to his body's senses, the frequency of the bullets was only half of what it used to be.

High-power bullets oppressed the magic shield. The strength of Masaki's shield was the same as his magic power, but in some respects, it was not as

precise as the magic shields of the Juumonji magicians who specialized in shield magic.

Before he was under heavy fire, he tumbled and laid face-down on the beach. From this position, he tracked the enemy's silhouette and activated 'Rupture'.

The windbreak exuded a fearful atmosphere. They probably witnessed the horrible death of their allies.

The advantage of Ichijou Family's 'Rupture' was not only its prowess, but the ability to also damage the enemy's morale.

Watching one's own soldiers spray and burst in blood, even those who had been in many battles would have struggled to watch this. Nobody would ever want to die like that.

Masaki could feel the enemy's accuracy failing.

If that was all it took to be frightened, then they should not have provoked war. Masaki thought within his heart.

On the other hand, he calmly calculated the enemy's panic as an opportunity.

"Counterattack!"

Masaki yelled without any fear.

The scene resounded with battle cries of 'Ooooooh!'

The magicians who had been forced to defend without counterattack all got up at the same time and advanced forward.

Gunfire resounded.

The flames from the grenade explosions lit up the beach at night.

Even so, it could not stop the assault of the Juumonji magicians.

Masaki was killing the enemies in the midst of blood flowers while advancing forward.

They finally advanced into the windbreak.

Deep within the forest, Katsuto was indeed 'crushing' the opponents.

The enemy soldiers threw down their guns and took out knives for combat.

This was the right way.

In the midst of battle, bullets that were shot out without fear of hitting their own men would be reflected as shrapnel by the magic shields, causing damage to their own forces.

Masaki, Katsuto, and the Juumonji Family magicians subdued the USNA illegal task force like a tsunami.



At the same time when they were about to meet up with the destroyer, Canopus received news that the intercepting squad responsible for delaying the pursuing group had been annihilated.

They had fulfilled their mission to delay the pursuing group's progress completely. Gu Jie, together with the amphibious vehicle, had already escaped onto the ship that had been standing by off the coast.

Although they had said 'annihilation,' the intercepting squad members were mostly alive. For the USNA, they would become witnesses who would be detrimental to the exposure of the USNA's involvement. The weapons that they held was more than enough evidence.

Canopus picked up the simple transmitter, closed his eyes, and prayed softly.

May their souls rest in peace.

Without any words asking for forgiveness.

Canopus opened his eyes and pressed the 'real' button that would annihilate the intercepting squad.



After confirming that the enemy had stopped resisting, Masaki searched for Katsuto's silhouette.

"Juumonji-dono!"

"Ichijou-dono, I am here."

Katsuto walked out from behind the trees. The both of their locations were rather close.

Katsuto was wearing an Anti-laceration sweater with a coat. Not only was his coat undamaged, it was also unstained with the slightest dirt.

The way his motorcycle racing suit was covered in dust made Masaki feel inferior to Katsuto. The amount of filth on their bodies seemed to signify the gap in their strength. This made Masaki a bit depressed.

“Ichijou-dono, what’s the matter?”

The expression on Masaki’s face probably made Katsuto very puzzled.

After Katsuto finished asking, Masaki shook his head to indicate that nothing was wrong.

“Nothing. Don’t mind this. How should we deal with these guys? I don’t think we can leave them be.”

“Right...”

Katsuto thought for a moment, and then nodded.

“Although it is not certain that they belong to a terrorist group, they did behave unscrupulously to this extent, so we cannot let them escape.”



The reason that Katsuto was perplexed lay in the fact that if they wasted more time here, then they might completely lose Gu Jie.

“Then, can we leave these guys to the Juumonji Family? I will pursue Gu Jie.”

Masaki was worried about the same thing. Thus, he suggested to split up.

“Though you say pursue, how will you catch up? From what I understand, Gu Jie should have escaped to the sea already.”

“I will chase him on water.”

“It seems that’s the only way...”

If they suffered the same fierce attacks on the sea, even if it was Katsuto, it would be a dilemma without a way out. It was not certain whether Masaki could completely defend against such an attack either.

However, compared to Katsuto, Masaki possessed longer range attacks.

Once he discovered Gu Jie’s ship, he could immediately destroy the turbines, preventing the ship from navigating. Even if he would mistakenly hit innocent vessels, the compelling importance of arresting Gu Jie, made it unavoidable. They could cover it up by giving the blame to the terrorists.

“Understood. Leave this to us.”

Katsuto decided.

No one could criticize him for being indecisive, nor could they have said that he made the decision too late.

That was because no one could have predicted that the enemy, who had been hindering their pursuit of Gu Jie, would use such an underhanded method in the end.

The moment Katsuto accepted Masaki’s suggestion.

The enemy force that had collapsed within the windbreaks suddenly combusted. This was not a metaphor, but as literal as the words described. Both the corpses and the bodies of the injured combusted into flames.

This was a self-detonation magic that used human ignition magic. No, describing it as self-detonation was incorrect. The non-regular soldiers of the USNA had been implanted with a sequence, and once it received an external signal, it would activate the human ignition magic.

Furthermore, for soldiers who are not magicians, the program was planted deep within their mind, and they would be burnt together alongside their magician counterparts.

Katsuto set up an emergency shield, protecting both himself and Masaki.

The Juumonji magicians that had followed him quickly set-up their magic wall as well.

They were definitely not making a huge fuss over a minor issue.

The enemy soldiers were not the only one spitting fire.

The weapons used by the enemy melted or exploded due to the high heat.

The shrapnel from the weapons struck the magic shield.

The flames that burnt human bodies into black ashes were about to spread to the windbreaks.

It was not just at one or two places.

“Extinguish the fire immediately!”

Katsuto gave the order loudly.

The top priority right now was not to pursue Gu Jie, but to prevent the fire from spreading.



On the main road, parallel to the coast, Tatsuya was running at 60km/h.

He was not using flying magic. There were a few reasons for this.

For this battle, Tatsuya did not accept the support of the Independent Magic Battalion. He hadn't been denied assistance either. Just before the battle at Zama station, Tatsuya had already received permission to use military classified magic. Though it was a request for permission, it was more like a notification.

Tatsuya did not seek help from the Independent Magic Battalion.

Neither did Battalion actively aid Tatsuya. As a result, obviously, Tatsuya was not wearing the mobile suit.

Even if he did not wear the mobile suit, he could still fly.

Since he did not have the resistance of the mobile suit, he could not fully cope with the enemy's attack. Tatsuya was not an expert in Anti-Material Barrier magic or Heat Resistant Barrier magic. He could detect the enemy's attack, then use Decomposition to repulse it. However, when he was in flight he could not predict from which angle and what distance the attack from the opposition was going to come from.

Therefore, he did not have a hundred percent success rate to repulse the attack.

Tatsuya whose forte was specialized magic originally had weak points in defense. Self-restoration magic was only used after injury, and even Tatsuya did not want to be used for a suicide mission.

Gu Jie had already travelled to the distant waters, moving at a relatively fast pace towards south-east direction. At this rate, it was a matter of time before they reached International Waters.

The ones assisting Gu Jie's escape have considerable organizational strength. Tatsuya believes it was the doing of USNA. Though he could not completely grasp what benefit USNA would receive from Gu Jie's escape, because of their intervention, the result would likely be Gu Jie's escape.

—Compared to letting him escape, there was a way to rid his worries.

Gu Jie's method of fooling with a magician's life was already a death sentence for him.

The best result was first to allow the police to arrest him, then assassinate him in prison.

However, Tatsuya started considering 'eliminate' Gu Jie as the backup plan.

Tatsuya was heading to the beach that Gu Jie used to escape to the sea.

He knew his target was no longer there, but he decided to meet up with Masaki and crew.

By the time Tatsuya had reached the location, the fire extinguishing had finished.

"What is going on?"

After Tatsuya asked such a question, Masaki showed a speechless, bitter expression.

The one who replied was Katsuto.

"The enemy self-detonated."

“There were obviously no dried-up trees, did the fire originate only from the self-detonation?”

“It seems they used human ignition magic.”

Once Tatsuya heard what kind of magic was used, he understood the intent of the enemy was to rid the evidence. For some unknown reason, it would seem that the USNA was attempting to stop them from arresting Gu Jie at all cost. Although it should be impossible, Gu Jie’s terrorist attacks could not really be a plan of theirs right?

“Shiba.”

While Tatsuya was thinking about things, Katsuto started to ask a question.

“Ichijou-dono said he wanted to use water walking magic to pursue Gu Jie. What do you think?”

Tatsuya eliminating Gu Jie here was the quickest method.

But this was a trump card that must be well hidden.

“Can we ask the Coastal Garrison for help?”

Masaki disagreed with Tatsuya’s suggestion.

“Would it not be too late to call for a ship?”

“We won’t pursuit from here. Gu Jie’s ship is located at the front of the island’s peninsula. If there is a patrol ship located there it could first intercept, then we could guide them from over here.”

Masaki did not know how Tatsuya was able to locate Gu Jie’s position with such ease, but he did not ask. Thought Katsuto probably had the same question, but because he was polite, he did not mention Tatsuya’s magic at all.

“Let me contact Tomokazu-dono then.”

Katsuto accepted Tatsuya’s suggestion, retrieving the information transmission terminal device.

As if Katsuto had timed the retrieval of his terminal device at the perfect moment, it had begun to ring.

The screen displayed the caller name as Saegusa Mayumi.

Katsuto turned on the speaker function to allow Tatsuya and Masaki to listen in, then he accepted the call.

“Saegusa? What’s the matter?”

“We probably don’t have much time, so I’ll get to the point.”

Mayumi should have no part in tonight’s pursuit battle plan. However, she seemed to have understood the situation from this side.

“I asked the patrol ship to let me on board, we are nearby. Can you see?”

Tatsuya, Katsuto, and Masaki looked towards the ocean. They could clearly see the lights of the patrol ship closing in to the beach near them.

“You want to help pursue Gu Jie?”

“Well, yes. Tatsuya-kun, are you there?”

Mayumi gave Katsuto a positive reply, then suddenly asked for Tatsuya.

“Yes, I am here.”

Although a bit unexpected, Tatsuya responded quickly without being flustered.

“You know where Gu Jie is, right? Are you able to get here?”

Mayumi’s request went according to Tatsuya’s wishes.

“Understood.”

Tatsuya agreed without uttering any other words.

“Saegusa-san, this is Ichijou. Can you let me on the ship as well?”

Masaki chimed in while being flustered.

“Sure. And Juumonji?”

Although it was a matter of course, Mayumi quickly agreed to let Masaki on board.

“The situation here is a bit complicated, I have to stay.”

Katsuto also wanted to participate in the chase, but he could not leave the

charred corpses, broken weapons and fire traces unattended.

Someone had to be responsible for notifying the police and fire departments and explain the details to them.

“Roger that. Tatsuya-kun and Ichijou-kun, I can’t send anyone over to pick you up, do you mind coming over here?”

“Understood.”

Tatsuya and Masaki answered with the terminal device in Katsuto’s hand.

The two of them ran as if they were racing to the coast. They were scrambling and rushing towards the patrol ship.

◇ ◇ ◇

Gu Jie, who had fled to the sea on the amphibious vehicle, enter the high-speed cargo ship together with the vehicle.

He was resting in the Captain’s room currently.

Hearing the knocking sounds at the door, Gu Jie simply answered ‘come in’.

“Lord, sorry to disturb you.”

As expected, the one who opened the door was Doe.

Gu Jie looked at him, with an afterthought ‘so he was this type of person’.

He was about thirty years old in age, with a height of 175 cm. Black hair, black eyes, with a tan skin tone. He had a plain complexion without any special characteristics. This look left people without much of an impression. Thought he had seen him several times already, every time it would give a false impression of a first meeting. It was probably because he had no spare time to care about such matters. Gu Jie self-deprecated in his heart.

“My Lord, did you want a drink?”

Doe’s hand was a bottle of Shaoxing wine. If the content was as the label suggests, even if it was not the highest end, it was definitely a top-quality variety.

“Give me a cup.”

After Gu Jie's reply, Doe nodded and placed the bottle on the table. He then retrieved a small glass cup from the cupboard.

Doe placed the cup in front of Gu Jie and poured in the Shaoxing wine.

Gu Jie picked up the cup and handed it over to Doe.

Thanks for the hard work. You can drink first."

"Ai ya, then excuse my rudeness."

Doe did not hesitate to take the cup and drank all the wine inside.

It was obvious that Gu Jie wanted Doe to test if there was poison in the drink so Doe drank without any resistance. He took out another small cup, and invited Gu Jie to drink the Shaoxing wine with him.

Gu Jie drank all the wine the Doe poured.

"En... good wine."

"I don't deserve your praise."

Gu Jie placed the glass cup back on the table while looking at the Doe who was standing.

"So, what's the situation?"

"It will take just less than one hour to leave Japanese waters. Currently there are no pursuers."

"That's it huh."

Although he did not show the expression or attitude, Gu Jie finally felt a sigh of relief. It was hard to say that it was safe. Even if they entered into international waters, it would not prevent a pursuit. However, he could not hold back the peace of mind he had from finally escaping from the grasp of the enemy.

"And after that? The Japanese should be aware of this ship."

"Yes, I think so too. Although it would cause trouble for my Lord, please transfer to another ship later."

"Your preparations are thorough."

“Lord, I’m honored by your praise. After the transfer to the next ship, it will directly head to Sydney.”

“We won’t stop at ports along the way?”

“Yes, I thought that would be best... However if my Lord had any ports in mind.”

“No, you can take care of it.”

“Understood. If you have any orders, I will come immediately.”

Doe left the room.

Gu Jie picked up the Shaoxing wine bottle left on the table.

◇ ◇ ◇

When Tatsuya jumped on to the Patrol Ship from the surface of the sea, the ones who welcomed him was Mayumi and Yakumo.

“Hai, Tatsuya, you are slow.”

“...Master, why are you here?”

Tatsuya inquired with a frown. Yakumo let out his usual leisurely smile.

“You’re actually asking me this. Did I not say that earlier? I am here to help resolve the incident. Did you forget?”

“What I wanted to ask wasn’t this. I am asking how Master got on this ship.”

While Tatsuya questioned Yakumo, Masaki who had just gotten on the boat questioned Mayumi on the side.

“Um, Saegusa-san, this monk is?”

Mayumi showed an awkward smile and replied to Masaki.

“This is Ninjutsu master Kokonoe Yakumo. He is Tatsuya-kun’s master. He said he was willing to help us.”

“Correctly speaking, I am not his Master. That’s because Tatsuya is not a ninja, nor is he a monk. I only help him practice Taijutsu a bit.”

Yakumo did not answer Tatsuya’s question, but instead interrupted Mayumi and Masaki’s discussion.

Tatsuya sharply glared at Yakumo, making Mayumi feel it was her fault, causing her to hurriedly reply.

“Although everyone told me not to do anything today, but I could not sit still.”

Tatsuya’s expression of ‘and so?’ urged her to continue speaking.

“Just in case, I had the patrol ship travel to the Hiratsuka’s New Port.

There, I discovered Master Yakumo... He said he knew where Tatsuya-kun was, so I invited him onto the ship. I also knew that he was Tatsuya-kun’s teacher... Was I not allowed to do this?”

After Mayumi asked while trembling, Tatsuya swallowed his sigh.

“...No, it’s fine.”

“Great.”

Listening to Yakumo’s words, Tatsuya did not know why he felt annoyed.

But he restrained himself from making meaningless questions and answers, instead focused on what should be done currently.

“Saegusa-senpai, let’s begin the pursuit immediately.”

“Yes. Then Tatsuya-kun will you help guide us on the route?”

“Understood.”

Tatsuya and Mayumi headed towards the deck of the patrol ship. Masaki and Yakumo followed closely.



Canopus, who was called to the destroyer’s battle intel center, put on a solemn face after hearing the report. Previously, in the planning rehearsal for the final stages of battle, the event that he had hoped was predicted incorrectly slowly became true.

“In general, Japan’s patrol ship caught up to Heigu’s cargo ship?”

Looking at the sea charts while listening to the explanation of the route and relative speed, Canopus summarized the content into the following line to confirm.

“It could be said so, but could also not be said so.”

Apart from the destroyer’s crew, one of the backup combat member stated the information once again to Canopus.

“It is predicted that Japan’s patrol ship will only catch up to Heigu’s vessel when they reach international waters. However, Japan has the Right to Pursuit, we cannot intervene.”

The Right to Pursuit (also called Right to Continuous Pursuit) was a right recognized by International Conventions. A country had the right to continue to pursue a vessel in international waters if the vessel violated the laws within that country’s territorial waters. Canopus already knew this without listening to the explanation.

“Need to change the final phase of the plan.”

The member used this line to answer the summary.

Canopus sighed deeply.

“Hard-line measure, huh...”

As expected, it wouldn't end so easily. Being able to avoid the worst situation by sinking Gu Jie’s vessel in Japanese waters, was already for the best. Canopus comforted himself with this thought.

“Inform me when Heigu’s ship gets near. I will be waiting in the cabin.”

“Understood, Major-dono.”

Under the farewells of the members, Canopus left the battle intel center.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Maintain the current course. We should have the visual on the target soon.”

Just as Tatsuya predicted, a ship appeared before the lights of the patrol ship.

The high-speed patrol ship prepared by Mayumi utilized its speed. Just before the ship that Heigu was riding in reached international waters, It had closed into visual range.

“Captain, please!”

Without hearing the full command from Mayumi, the Captain of the patrol ship had order his crew to issue the suspension signal.

Using both loudspeakers and signal lamp to advise the ship that Gu Jie was riding on to stop sailing. Thus, the pursuit right was established.

The bridge of the patrol ship was filled with relief.

◇ ◇ ◇

The stop command was issued in multiple languages. It had reached the ears of Gu Jie who had been resting in his room.

Someone hurriedly knocked on the cabin door.

“Enter!”

Gu Jie’s voice revealed some anxiety.

“My Lord, sorry to disturb you!”

Doe who had been watching the door could not conceal his panic.

“Japan’s patrol ship seems to have spotted us. How many vessels are there?”

“One ship.”

Doe did not understand why Gu Jie asked this question, thus answered on reflex.

“So, how should we proceed?”

“Flee to international waters just like this.”

“But, their speed is rather fast?”

It was not clear why Doe was responding to Gu Jie’s accusations so confidently.

“Our ship will standby on the perimeter of Japanese territorial waters. The following course of the ship will be a bit rough, please be careful.”

Currently, Gu Jie had no pawns. He did not have the battle ability to sink the patrol ship.

But he was not completely helpless.

If he was out of pawns, he could make more.

There was not enough time or tools, so he can only produce consumables. Fortunately, there was only one ship of pursuers. Once he broke through the current predicament, he would find a way out of danger.

Gu Jie looked at the man that claimed to be John Doe. The first time they met, he already knew that this man had very good talent. Though he seemed to have hidden his strength, but Gu Jie saw through him with one glance.

Moreover, Gu Jie was convinced that he had concealed some things.

“Understood. Doe, I’ll leave this to you.”

“I will do as you bid, my Lord.”

Du bowed deeply to the point of exposing his back while concealing his hand.

Gu Jie activated the magic he had pre-set on Doe’s body.

Doe’s body twitched as though he was having a seizure.

Soon after, he fell forwards.

The collapsed Doe was holding a small pistol within his right hand.

“Is your goal to assassinate me? To put in such effort just to assassinate me. Do you think I will believe a man who I have never met before unconditionally?”

Gu Jie issued the next command using the mouth that had ridiculed the corpse.

“Doe, get up.”

Doe’s physical movements began slowly, but then immediately got up as though energy had returned to his body.

“Do you understand my words?”

Doe nodded his head.

Upon seeing his response, Gu Jie could only smack his own lips.

“Can’t speak anymore.”

Although he had preset the magic, but at the time he had omitted even the simplest ceremonies. It would seem that the preparations were not enough.

The process to convert life force into magic fuel had been successful, but the body had lost some of its function.

Gu Jie gave up on inquiring about Doe's background. He ordered him to handle the patrol ship.

"Doe, sink along with the Japanese Patrol Ship."

Doe nodded his head in the same way and left the cabin.

Gu Jie also left the cabin and headed towards the bridge to control the ship.

◇ ◇ ◇

Hearing the sounds of knocking, Canopus responded with "Enter".

The one who entered was not a destroyer crew member, but a combat member.

The member closed the door after entering the cabin. He stood in front of Canopus.

"Major, Joseph Doe's life signal disappeared."

Canopus raised his eyebrows and asked the combat member.

"The assassination failed?"

"Regrettably, it is likely that it failed."

Canopus got up silently.

When he wanted to exit the cabin, the combat member stopped him.

"Major, the amphibious vehicle used by Gu Jie to escape to the sea is heading straight towards Japan's patrol ship from the current vessel he is on."

"We need not care. The Japanese patrol ship will most likely sink that vessel."

Canopus picked up the sword shaped armament device that was standing next to the door. He then went to the deck to solve everything with his own hands.

◇ ◇ ◇

The target that was sent the stop signal did not have any signs of slowing down. Seeing the situation, the Captain of the patrol ship ordered for the firing

of another warning.

“Take aim, the suspicious vessel is closing in quickly... Please Wait!

Confirming that the enemy vessel only sent out a small boat!”

Mayumi was the first to react to the Shooting Controller’s report.

“Tatsuya-kun!”

“No, Gu Jie is not on the small boat.”

Mayumi was not the only one to suspect that Gu Jie was attempting to escape via the small boat. Because Tatsuya suspected the same thing, he could immediately reply to Mayumi.

Then, what was the purpose of the small boat?

The answer would be revealed immediately.

“The small boat is heading straight for us!”

“Any weapons!? What kind of boat is it!?”

Immediately after the Captain finished asking, the Shooting Controller answered in a tone as if he was in disbelief.

“It is an amphibious vehicle! Such speed! What is this absurd speed!?”

Knowing that it was impossible for the speed of an amphibious vehicle to be so fast, the controller could only be stunned speechless.

“That acceleration is the result of magic!”

Masaki said in a firm tone, at the same he pointed his bright red CAD towards the amphibious vehicle.

The Psion light released from Masaki’s body lit up radiantly.

“Rupture” was activated.

The small boat seemed to be using a hydrogen engine, therefore the fuel did not explode. Looks like the hydrogen fuel diffused before a fire could start.

Given the situation, this also meant that the magician in the amphibious vehicle did not receive a fatal blow.

As the amphibious vehicle sank gradually, the silhouette appearing from the vehicle started travelling towards them at high speeds as though he was water skiing on the sea.

“Shoot warning fire towards the fleeing vessel, we will handle *that* person.”

Mayumi suggested to the captain. She had already finish her magic activation sequence.

“Aim!”

“Aim, the suspicious vessel is very close!”

“Preparations for firing complete!”

“Fire!”

The tracer bomb bombardment sailed past the side of the ship that Gu Jie was on.

At the same time, Mayumi launched her magic.

“Magic Shooter”

Mayumi did not necessarily require dry ice to materialize her bullets.

Even if it was normal ice bullets, she would have the same control as if they were dry ice. To be honest, Mayumi’s full potential could be released when she was on the sea or lake where there was ample water to materialize bullets from.

Mayumi created ice bullets directly from the sea water, a magician of the sea — a personal belief — fired at the silhouette from all directions while predicted his movements. The silhouette could not withstand the barrage and sank into the water.

“Suspicious vessel has left our territorial waters.”

“No problem, intercept it from the front.”

In accordance to the command of the Captain, the patrol ship closed in on the ship Gu Jie was riding on.

Mayumi seemed concerned about the magician that had fallen into the ocean, but did not say to have him rescued. Apprehending Gu Jie was the

mission she was entrusted with.

When they were one step away from catching up to Gu Jie's vessel, the Radar Officer said in a concerned voice.

"Captain! USNA's destroyer is approaching us!"

"What!?"

The Captain could not contain his shock.

USNA's destroyer was anchored in close proximity to the border between Japan's territorial waters and international waters. This was something that they had been aware of since the start of the chase. When inquired about their identity, they also revealed who they were. It was concerning that the location of the destroyer was directly in the escape route of the suspicious vessel, but because they had not taken any hostile action, the Japanese forces could not intervene.

However, the opposition began to move suddenly.

From the navigation route of the destroyer, it was possible that they were assisting in the arrest of the suspicious vessel, at the same time, the destroyer could also be trying to obstruct the arrest.

The staff on the bridge rushed into action. The correspondents quickly began to set up communications with the destroyer.

◇ ◇ ◇

"Target has reached international waters."

"Forward at half speed."

The destroyer moved in accordance to the Captain's instructions. The ship's course was headed southwest. To the right was the ship that Gu Jie was hiding in, just further away was the Japanese Patrol Vessel.

Equipped with a powerful engine, the USNA destroyer caught up to Gu Jie's high-speed cargo ship in the blink of an eye.

At the front of the deck stood Canopus, unsheathing an armament device modelled after a Japanese sword, watching the cargo ship.



Gu Jie, who had arrived to the deck, had turned the entire crew including the captain into his puppets. Although the crew had almost no resistance, the process of turning them into puppets was not instantaneous. Before Gu Jie's jutsu completed, the ship had been sailing straight and nobody had been paying attention to the surroundings.

Gu Jie was only aware of the destroyer closing in until they were about to collide.

"Stop the ship!"

"Full speed retreat!"

The crew on the deck was deprived of free will, they can still complete what was order with the same technical expertise as before.

The Cargo ship halted in accordance to the command of the Captain.

The Cargo ship gradually slowed down, until it stopped moving.

The destroyer closed into the Cargo ship's path.

It seems collision had been avoided. The instant Gu Jie thought of this, he felt a powerful magic pressure and immediate stopped thinking.



Canopus raised the armament device used for 'Molecular Divider'.

Gu Jie's position was reflected on the transparent screen of the glasses.

This could only be achieved because Special Agent Joseph Doe had sacrificed his life to install the transmitter.

Second only to STARS First Unit Captain Angie Sirius, USNA's second strongest, Major Benjamin Canopus launched the most powerful 'Molecular Divider' towards Gu Jie who was aboard the cargo ship.



"Full speed retreat!"

The patrol ship issued the same order as the cargo ship in hopes of avoiding

collision with the destroyer.

The bow of the destroyer was now in direct line of the cargo ship's navigation route.

At this time.

Tatsuya felt the activation of a powerful magic.

The Magic Activation Target Object Area was a slender sheet space with total length of seven hundred meters.

Extremely large-scale Area Magic.

It was magic categorized under 'intermolecular binding force reversal', also known as 'Molecular Divider'.

(Do they intend to chop Gu Jie together with the rest of the ship in half!?)

If one was to receive a strike of Molecular Divider of that magnitude, no corpse would remain. They would basically disappear together with the ship in the vast ocean.

If he allowed the opposition to do that, all of Tatsuya's hard work up until this point would have been in vain.

If the goal had been elimination, everything would have been ended earlier in the morning.

Tatsuya intends to use Gram Dispersion to cause Molecular Divider to fail.

Almost as if it was a habit, he stretched his right hand forward.

Yakumo caught his hand.

Tatsuya glared at Yakumo.

Yakumo immediately began to shake his head.

Suddenly, Tatsuya's heart had a moment of hesitation.

And it was during this instant, Molecular Divider was activated; a giant blade came crashing down.

The ship that was carrying Gu Jie was split in two halves without the slightest resistance.

At the same time, the Psion marker that Tatsuya left in Gu Jie's body dissipated.



The individual “human” existence known as Gu Jie disappeared.

“Just now, that was... what was that?”

“It was... Molecular Divider?”

Mayumi and Masaki muttered blankly.

Tatsuya glared at Yakumo with sharp eyes.

But Tatsuya also saw Yakumo return a glare with the same intensity, hence he gave up on questioning Yakumo's intentions.

The Captain personally cursed in rage at the microphone of the communication device.

The Captain of the destroyer answered in a steady voice.

Their Captain said that the ship was a notorious pirate ship that they had been tracking thus far.

He advocated the reason why they sank the cargo ship was because the pirate ship was ignoring all stop warnings and had attempted to escape.

Given the situation, they were forced to do what they did.

"Wasn't that ship ready to stop!"

"From our perspective that was certainly not the case."

"Lying with your eyes wide open!"

"If you have any objections, then send them through the proper diplomatic channels."

After the destroyer finished their communication, they had changed their course towards the East.

The crew of the patrol ship were not the only ones gritting their teeth as they watched the destroyer leave.

Tatsuya, Masaki and Mayumi were left with feelings of emptiness. All that remained was the view of the back of the destroyer in the distance, and the ocean that had engulfed Gu Jie.

Chapter 14

Having lost his beloved scooter, Tatsuya rode with Yakumo until he reached his house. The automated public transit system ran 24 hours a day, but he had various items with him that could get him into trouble if he were to be discovered with them.

Sitting on the right side of the back seat, Tatsuya hardly said a word during the entire ride. Yakumo sat beside him, also keeping his mouth shut.

Tatsuya spoke to Yakumo when they were about over halfway to their destination.

“Master, are you awake?”

“Yeah, I’m awake.”

Yakumo, who was sitting still with his eyes closed, opened his eyes and faced Tatsuya.

Tatsuya continued looking forward, not meeting Yakumo’s gaze.

“About before, why did you get in my way?”

“When you were about to nullify the American Army’s magic?”

“That’s right.”

Tatsuya did not raise his voice. His voice was grave, like unfathomable darkness.

“I think a better question is: Why were you acting so carelessly in the first place?”

Yakumo had answered Tatsuya’s question in the form of a question.

What he really meant was, ‘I stopped you because you were being careless’.

“Even if it did kill Gu Jie, if we can’t demonstrate that he was the terrorist mastermind, they wouldn’t cooperate with our efforts to eradicate the terrorists. It would have been ideal if we had the same jurisdiction as they did. Stopping that Molecular Divider was the best possible way for that incident to be resolved.”

Tatsuya drew a breath in response, gritting his teeth in regret.

“However, if we can’t actually recover Gu Jie’s corpse, then the truth of the terrorist incident will be left in the dark.”

“Is settling this incident really that important to you?”

Yakumo’s sharp counterargument gave Tatsuya cause for surprise.

At first Tatsuya couldn’t even find the words to respond with, which Yakumo seized as an opportunity for a follow-up.

“You were attempting to nullify Molecular Divider used by the American Army’s No. 2 Magician, Benjamin Canopus.”

Tatsuya suddenly looked to Yakumo, his eyes wide open.

He was surprised for two reasons.

The fact that Benjamin Canopus, the No. 2 of STARS, had appeared in response to a local incident was the first.

This was a very important incident for the Ten Master Clans, but he didn’t think it was something that would catch the national interest of the USNA. Additionally, the USNA would absolutely have to keep their involvement in the incident a secret.

The second reason was that somehow, Yakumo was aware of Canopus’ involvement.

Had he not thought about it, Tatsuya could not accept that, such a sort of large-scale magic was the work of the No. 2 of STARS. But that meant that if it really was Canopus, then Tatsuya could accept it. Just by a visual inspection of that spell, there was no way to identify that the Magician who had activated it was Benjamin Canopus.

Yakumo would have to have known about Canopus’ involvement for quite some time.

Tatsuya expected that Yakumo would notice his surprise, but it seemed that Yakumo had not noticed.

“I believe that last year you met with STARS’ Head-Captain Angie Sirius. If you

had nullified Canopus' magic, the American Military would certainly think it was your work. You're not a nameless magician with no background like before. You're a magician of the Yotsuba Family, known as the fiancé to the next Head of the Yotsuba Family.

The glint in Yakumo's eyes had grown even sharper.

Tatsuya was very self-conscious of himself in this high-pressure atmosphere.

"The Yotsuba name, as I am sure you are aware, carries significant weight. At that time, if you had 'decomposed' Canopus' Molecular Divider, the American Military would have likely designated you as a hostile. And it's safe to say that as a threat to the hegemony of the USA, you would be targeted for assassination."

Yakumo's sharp gaze drilled into Tatsuya as he delivered his assessment of the situation.

"That would certainly put Miyuki-kun in danger as well. Were you thinking that far, back then? I certainly don't think that you did."

◇ ◇ ◇

By the time that Tatsuya got home, it was already the next day, the time being 2:00 A.M.

Everyone should have already been asleep. Thinking so, Tatsuya unlocked the security and silently opened the door to the entryway.

"Welcome home, Onii-sama."

There was Miyuki, sitting on her knees and waiting for him.

"U-uh, yeah. I'm home."

Surprised by this unexpected welcome, Tatsuya hesitated for a moment.

Miyuki couldn't help but show her usual elegance with a dainty bow, before raising her smiling face to look at Tatsuya.

"Are you tired? How about a bath? Or perhaps you're hungry? Or..."

"Thanks. I'll take a bath first. If you could fix up something light for dinner, that would be great."

Miyuki probably wouldn't make any dirty jokes like 'Or perhaps you'd like me?', but Tatsuya felt an unsettling atmosphere, so he interrupted her mid-sentence.

"Understood."

The person responding this time was Minami, who had appeared while Miyuki spoke. Her unsatisfied facial expression was probably because Miyuki had dragged her out to welcome Tatsuya home.

They weren't the only two people awake.

"Tatsuya-niisan, thank you for your hard work."

"Tatsuya-san, it must be tough working so late."

Fumiya and Ayako, who were staying at their house starting that day, appeared from the living room.

"All of you... what are you doing up so late...?"

In response to Tatsuya's surprised question, Miyuki puffed out her chest with pride. To be correct, she didn't really puff out her chest though the atmosphere certainly felt like she was.

"I know they've been working you hard lately Onii-sama, but I can't let you come home late and go to sleep all alone."

"Miyuki-oneesama, you sound just like a young wife when you talk like that."

However, the one who flushed red at Ayako's quip was Fumiya.

All Miyuki did was smile faintly.

Telling all of them "just go to sleep already" wasn't going to work.

Judging that to be the case, Tatsuya quickly made for the bathroom.

Tatsuya collected his weapons and combat suit separately from the regular laundry, and after vigorously scrubbing the blood off, Tatsuya went to the dining room in a sweatshirt and sweatpants.

Miyuki, Fumiya, and Ayako sat together at the dining table, with Minami

standing to Miyuki's side.

Tatsuya sat down at his seat, and Minami promptly brought him some sandwiches.

Minami then presented Tatsuya with a cup of herbal tea, saying "Hopefully this is alright." Perhaps taking into account how late into the night it was, Tatsuya simply nodded, saying "It's fine."

Then, Tatsuya turned his head to face each of the three people staring at him, one at a time.

"The mission was a failure."

Tatsuya made this announcement to the three of them, no, four if Minami was included before partaking of his sandwich or tea.

Everyone aside from Tatsuya drew a breath.

While they sat speechless, Tatsuya picked up and ate two of his sandwiches.

"Ah... erm, Onii-sama. By failure, you mean that Gu Jie..."

Miyuki wanted to say "got away" but she couldn't bring herself to finish the sentence.

Tatsuya wolfed down his last sandwich, then looked at Miyuki.

"No. We confirmed Gu Jie's death."

Miyuki looked relieved at Tatsuya's response. Fumiya and Ayako also relaxed their faces, which had been stiffened with tension.

"You mean to say he put up a fierce resistance so you were forced to kill him. That's a sort of failure in itself, right? I mean, it would have been best if he were alive to answer for his crimes, but Oba-sama did say 'Dead or alive...'"

"No, that's not what I meant."

Miyuki looked uneasily at Tatsuya, who was shaking his head.

Similarly, Fumiya and Ayako exchanged ambiguous looks with each other.

"Gu Jie was killed by an USNA Magician. No corpse was left behind.

As a consequence, there is no evidence we can present to the public to prove

that ‘This man was the mastermind.’ Now, the people of the city may never learn who the terrorist mastermind was, and they may never know whether he is alive or dead.”

“But, the terrorist mastermind was a former Dahan Magician known as Gu Jie, and now Gu Jie is dead right? So hasn’t the incident been solved?”

Ayako offered her opinion, but Tatsuya shook his head again.

“There is no objective evidence proving that Gu Jie was the terrorist mastermind. We knew that Gu Jie was behind it, but there’s no method we can use to prove that to society. Assuming that we were even able to pin him as the principal offender, no corpse was left behind which means we would be unable to clear any doubts that he wasn’t still alive somewhere.

Ayako had a look on her face as though saying “Ah...” and Fumiya gazed at Tatsuya with pursed lips. Shifting his gaze from the contrasting twins, Tatsuya looked toward Miyuki.

Miyuki was simply looking toward him with an anxious expression.

“The goal of this mission was to demonstrate to society that we Magicians had solved the terrorist incident. The fact that the people of the city are left with remaining unease must be said to be a failure.”

An oppressive silence fell over the dining table.

Tatsuya drank the last of his herb tea and placed his cup on this table. As if invited by the clinking of the teacup, Miyuki spoke.

“Even if people in society are uneasy, we know that the incident has been solved. We know that you tracked down Gu Jie, Onii-sama.

And...”

Miyuki strongly fixed her gaze on Tatsuya.

“Onii-sama, you came home safely. I am happier for that more than anything else.”

Miyuki smiled beautifully at Tatsuya. You couldn’t even compare her facial expression to a beautiful flower or a jewel. There was no other way to describe it than “beautiful.”

“Onii-sama, thank you for your hard work.”

Miyuki warmly consoled Tatsuya.



After that, Tatsuya and Miyuki immediately returned to their own rooms.

Minami left the dining room, leaving the dishes to the HAR.

Fumiya and Ayako were laying on the two beds in the bedroom that had been provided to them. Tatsuya had told them that since he was now home there was no need for them to keep vigil over the house, which made them harbor some dissatisfaction towards their reason for existing.

“...Fumiya, are you still up?”

Ayako spoke to Fumiya, just as he was starting to doze off.

“...Yeah, I’m awake. What is it, nee-san?”

Paying no mind to the interruption of his sleep, Fumiya spoke with no discomfort in his voice.

“Erm... It’s not anything important, but...”

“Can’t sleep?”

In response to Fumiya’s question, she laughed wryly.

“That reminds me, it’s been a long time since we’ve slept in the same room like this.”

Their good relationship as siblings was well known ever since long ago.

It wasn’t just for show because they truly were good friends. Even if they exchanged some harsh words, they still trusted each other more than anyone else.

They had slept in the same room ever since they were very young.

Though they were a girl and a boy of around the same age, they never truly got into an argument. Even so, sleeping in beds lined up like this, it was like they had returned to their childhood, when being a girl or a boy didn’t matter at all.

“Yeah. Although honestly I was a little resistant to being in the same room

with you, it feels pretty good and I can't help but want to thank Tatsuya-san for this.”

This time it was Fumiya who responded with a wry laugh.

“Speaking of Tatsuya-niisan, it’s a little odd to see him so down like that... He looked a bit happier, thanks to Miyuki-san. That’s to be expected of her, though. When she did that, they seemed like fiancées, and not siblings.

“I’m just no match for her...”

Hearing Fumiya’s words, Ayako dropped her usual ladylike tone, speaking like a regular girl.

“Fumiya, you saw it right? That smile on Miyuki-oneesama’s face. I don’t think I’ve ever smiled that way.”

Had those been words of envy, Fumiya could have poked fun at her or mocked her. But his older sister’s words were from her heart, and for a moment Fumiya was at a loss for how to respond.

“Her face is beautiful to begin with, but... I don’t think she’d manage such a pretty smile with just that alone. Miyuki-oneesama must be thinking about him all the time... I felt like she was speaking to Tatsuya-san with more eloquence than a million sweet nothings.”

Ayako let out a soft sigh.

Softly, so not even Fumiya would hear it.

However, her lonely sigh didn’t escape Fumiya’s ears.

“Tatsuya-san did seem to cheer up, didn’t he?”

Ayako was silent.

Before the silence became too long, Fumiya replied.

“It’s completely obvious that Miyuki-san is gorgeous, but you’re pretty good yourself, you know?”

“...I’m not really in the mood for flattery, sorry.”

“I’m not trying to flatter you. Speaking objectively, you ARE beautiful.”

“...Am I just imagining it, or am I being overevaluated?”

“No, no, not at all. Even at Fourth High, Nee-san, there were tons of guys that wanted to go out with you.”

“...You’re still going? Well then, I suppose I’ll say this, Yami-chan.”

Ayako definitely heard the sound of Fumiya holding his breath.

Ayako snickered, and continued speaking with a playful tone.

“Objectively speaking, Yami-chan is a beautiful girl too, right? Then what about all those boys who have only seen her dressed up as a man? If they saw her as a pretty girl, she’d be the talk of the school.”

“I am not ‘dressing up as a man’!”

“I’m not really interested in this sort of thing, but you know that there are girls at school who love talking about two boys getting intimate with each other, and I’ve heard them talking about Yami-chan many times. You know, about who would suit Fumiya more...”

“I have no interest in that at all!”

Causing a fuss in the middle of the night would be problematic, so Fumiya yelled at his sister with the lowest possible voice that could still qualify as a shout, then turned his back to her.

“Goodnight!”

Fumiya curled up in his bed.

Ayako sat giggling to herself for a bit, then she gratefully replied “Good night” to her brother.



Although the night was ending, Gu Jie had not been captured, dead or alive.

February 20th, 2097. Tatsuya was paying a visit to the Chiba Family, along with Yakumo and his apprentice.

The purpose of their visit was to deliver the corpse of Chiba Toshikazu.

Masaki, who had destroyed Inagaki’s dead body in an ‘Rupture’ said that he

would accompany them, but Yakumo had stopped him, saying, “We’re going to explain his death, not to make an apology.”

Miyuki was only told that they were going to handle the incident cleanup. She was also instructed not to leave the house, along with Fumiya, Ayako, and Minami. Right now, they were most likely enjoying a friendly game together. Or perhaps, they were making sweets together. Fumiya was the only guy among three girls... so there was also the possibility that the girls would subject him to their own sort of 'fun.'

They had already notified the Chiba Family that they would be visiting this morning, and had briefed them on the purpose of the visit.

The members of the Chiba Family were enveloped in grief, as they came out to receive the station-wagon carrying Toshikazu’s body.

“I am truly sorry for your loss.”

Yakumo had stepped out of the car and was offering his condolences to the family members not as a priest, but as a person.

“My foolish son has caused you a great deal of trouble.”

Chiba Jouichirou, the Family Head and Toshikazu’s father, was bowing his head deeply. Despite being 50 years old, he was a large, muscular man who still appeared to be in his prime. Even so, his spirit was dampened by the loss of his son. His body appeared smaller than it really was.

Yakumo’s apprentice brought out Toshikazu’s body. His face was covered, but you could easily tell it was him just from his body, and a woman dressed in black began to weep. If Tatsuya’s memory served him, it was Toshikazu’s elder sister Sanae.

Tatsuya saw other faces that he recognized among the people who were coming out. He saw tears welling in the eyes of even the top pupils of the Chiba Family.

Chiba Toshikazu’s brother Naotsugu, who was said to be ‘Chiba’s Child Prodigy,’ was nowhere to be seen. There were rumors that the brothers did not get along well, but surely he was not deliberately absent. Perhaps he was away from the house, busy with research or an errand.

The last person Tatsuya laid eyes on was Erika, standing at the very end of the line of people. To be honest, he didn't want to see her right now, but couldn't help meeting his eyes with hers. His biggest goal in coming here today was to speak with Erika.

"Please, come inside."

At Jouichirou's back, Chiba pupils appeared to take Toshikazu's body from Yakumo's apprentice and placed it on a stretcher. Then, they went into the main building, Yakumo first, and Tatsuya after him.

The corpse was taken into Toshikazu's own room. It would be laid on his futon for the time being. For a single man, Toshikazu's room was surprisingly clean. No, that was not the right way to put it. The only items in Toshikazu's room were a desk, a closet, and a single sword, resting on a sword rack.

Neither Yakumo nor his apprentice had prepared any Buddhist sutras for chanting. The memorial service would be held at the Chiba Family's temple. Yakumo's apprentice hadn't come inside, rather, he was waiting outside with the station wagon.

Yakumo and Tatsuya then headed to the reception hall along with Jouichirou. There were no cushy sofas, only a single cushion on a tatami floor. Neither Tatsuya nor Yakumo was bothered by sitting on their feet.

However, for modern people who were not used to sitting in this manner on tatami mats, this style of this house must surely be painful to them.

"We have imposed on you a great deal of trouble. Please allow us to offer both our gratitude and sincere apologies once more."

Jouichirou placed his hands on the tatami mat and bowed his head deeply. Erika sat next to him, performing the same motion.

Erika was the only other person present in the room on the Chiba Family side. Both Yakumo and Tatsuya knew that Jouichirou had already lost his wife. It had also been confirmed that Naotsugu was not present.

Sanae had been left in Toshikazu's room; there was no doubt she was still

weeping over his body. Erika, by contrast, had yet to shed a single tear.

Further contrasting Sanae, who wore proper mourning attire, Erika was dressed in her First High School uniform. It was a full-dress uniform so there was no real issue, but a green blazer with a white one piece was definitely out of place with the rest of the family's mourning clothes.

Incidentally, Tatsuya had come wearing a black suit.

"Your son met his end under fairly unusual circumstances, so Chiba-sama, I believe it would be best for me to explain to you what happened. That is, if it is not too much trouble. I will leave the decision to you."

Jouichirou bowed his head once more in response to Yakumo's words, this time more lightly than before.

"Please, by all means. Honestly speaking, I am terribly confused by all this."

"You have my sincerest sympathy."

Having prefaced his explanation, Yakumo began to explain just what had happened to Chiba Toshikazu.

Toshikazu had been captured and transformed into a puppet by a traditional magician from Dahan, who was considered to be the top suspect in the Hakone Terror Incident.

"Last night, Toshikazu had attacked the search team as they were tracking the suspect."

"Tatsuya had been among the members of that search team, and Toshikazu had been defeated by him."

"By the time of his battle with Tatsuya, he was already deceased."

"...As we performed a ceremony to cleanse the curse overnight, I believe that there are no remnants of the evil magic."

Yakumo ended his explanation, and Jouichirou shut his eyes.

His fist was placed on his knee, and occasionally it could be seen trembling.

"...Thank you for all of your assistance."

When his eyes finally opened, Jouichirou no longer displayed any trembling

whatsoever.

With the discussion concluded, tea was brought out for Yakumo and his apprentice. Jouichirou seemed like he wanted to speak to Tatsuya, but Erika had taken him to the dojo first.

Jouichirou did not blame his daughter for her uncouth behavior. He had been convinced that Tatsuya actually wanted to speak with Erika.

Not a single person was in the dojo. It was certainly because of what had happened to Toshikazu. It was only natural that practice would be suspended for the day.

Erika proceeded straight into the heart of the dojo where she sat straight down on the wooden floor.

Tatsuya also sat down, facing her.

“I am deeply grateful that you brought my brother back home to us.”

Without warning, Erika bowed her head deeply.

Before Tatsuya had any time to react, she immediately raised her head back up, her gaze piercing straight through him.

“There is something I need you to tell me.”

Her words were as sharp as they always were. However, her voice had a coldness to it that was very different from normal.

“Did you capture the magician who was responsible for transforming my stupid brother into a doll?”

There was anger in the way she said “stupid brother.” Rather, it made her sorrow completely obvious.

“He’s dead. We didn’t retrieve the body, either.”

“I see...”

Erika clenched her back teeth together.

Tatsuya thought it was rather strange that he could not hear her grinding her

teeth.

“Well then.”

As though in pain, Erika forced herself to say the words.

“The only person I can get revenge on is you, Tatsuya-kun.”

“I suppose so.”

With just a few words, Tatsuya had accepted Erika’s unreasonable accusation.

Tatsuya himself had acknowledged that he was the one who had finished Toshikazu off, after all.

Tatsuya nodded, and Erika began to visibly shake.

“...Tatsuya-kun, couldn’t you have done something with your magic?”

Erika knew what Tatsuya’s “Regrowth” required in exchange.

She understood that placing that much burden on Tatsuya was simply unreasonable.

She also comprehended the fact that Toshikazu had paid the price for his error with his own life.

Despite all that, she still asked the question.

“The dead can’t be brought back to life.”

Tatsuya responded in a matter-of-fact tone.

There was not a hint of guilt in his voice.

There was no reason for Tatsuya to feel guilty. That much was simple logic. But, Erika could not restrain her anger at Tatsuya’s cold-hearted attitude.

“—Shiba Tatsuya! You shall fight with me!”

Erika was standing on just one knee, as if about to rise.

With a spinning kick, Tatsuya knocked her right off her feet.

Erika was blown almost all the way back to the wall.

With a hand on the wall, she regained her footing, snatching a wooden sword from the wall and turning back to face the center of the Dojo.

Tatsuya was facing her with his hands at his sides, in a natural stance.

Erika assumed a fighting stance, pointing the wooden sword at Tatsuya's face.

As though he had been waiting for this, Tatsuya began walking forward.

Erika, without any concern for keeping up with Tatsuya's pace, walked in a gait that was neither fast nor slow.

"Yaaaah!"

Erika raised the sword up over her head.

Tatsuya's feet did not stop.

Erika then swung the sword downwards. Her sword technique this time was just brute force, with none of her usual sharpness.

Tatsuya seized the descending sword in one hand. By fixing his arm and using the power in the central axis of his body, he simply swung Erika along with the wooden sword.

Erika released the wooden sword without any resistance.

Erika rolled on the floor, catching herself with her knee, but when she tried to get up she found the wooden sword's point had been thrust right before her eyes.

Tatsuya had turned the sword he stole from Erika against her.

"You... you win."

Erika's eyes overflowed with tears as she acknowledged her loss. She placed her hands on the floor, facing downwards as she wept.

Tatsuya stood in front of her until Erika had managed to stop crying.

For whatever reason, nobody came to the Dojo during that time.

"...You know, when a girl is crying, you should probably give her a handkerchief or something."

With a wry smile Tatsuya offered Erika his handkerchief.

"No need to give it back."

"Well then, don't mind if I do!"

With the hanky she received from Tatsuya, Erika dried her tears and blew her nose. Perhaps his hanky wasn't enough, because she also wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her uniform.

"...You know? If that had been the real thing, your hand would have been cut."

Erika suddenly offered an excuse for her loss. She seemed to be talking about when Tatsuya grabbed the wooden sword's 'blade' with his hand.

"But that's a wooden sword."

Tatsuya gave a strained laugh as he looked at the wooden sword, which had been discarded on the floor after the match.

"Urgh... what's with kicking me all of a sudden like that!"

"I thought the fight had already started."

"Nnnngggghhh..."

Erika groaned in irritation. She was looking and acting like she normally did, now.



With her eyes still red from weeping, she once again gazed sharply at Tatsuya this time. However, this time she gazed at Tatsuya with an expression of someone who was just cleansed of a demon lurking in her heart. She asked Tatsuya another question.

“—Tatsuya-kun. Was my stupid brother strong?”

“Yes. Despite being transformed into a puppet, he was definitely strong.”

“I see... Tatsuya-kun, for you to praise him like that is a very generous offer of condolences for my stupid brother.”

Erika turned her back to Tatsuya as she said this.

She hadn't apologized for provoking Tatsuya into a fight with her.

Tatsuya didn't want her to apologize either.



Taking his leave from the Chiba Family, Yakumo had been sent off by Jouichirou and his top pupil. Now, they were in the station wagon, and Yakumo turned to Tatsuya in the passenger seat, speaking to him with a sly grin.

"I thought your cheeks would be a little bit redder."

"Erika would never be convinced if I deliberately let her hit me."

"I see. She's got the blood of a warrior, even if she is a woman."

Yakumo produced a villainous laugh, "kukuku..." to himself for a while.

"So, what shall we do for the rest of the day?"

He asked Tatsuya.

"I'm going to go back home for now, and then report to the Main House."

"In person? Not by phone?"

"Yes, I'm going to take my scolding bravely."

"I don't think there's anything to scold you for, though..."

Toudou Aoba, the Sponsor for the Yotsuba Family, had explicitly requested Yakumo to "watch over Shiba Tatsuya so that he does not go too far." Given yesterday's events, Yakumo's top priority was to intervene and keep Tatsuya and Miyuki from attracting any more attention from the USNA, but this too was likely within the scope of Toudou's request.

As it were, the situation had been handled in a manner that conformed to the Sponsor's intentions, so there was nothing to assign blame for.

However, Tatsuya wasn't aware of that. Even if he knew of Toudou Aoba's existence, he wasn't acquainted with him. Tatsuya didn't even know what his face looked like.

Yakumo couldn't help his words from coming across as evasive.

“Honestly, I don’t think Oba-ue is really that worried about it, but formalities are important for things like this.”

“So you’re putting up the appearance of going to apologize in person, huh. You’re struggling too, aren’t you?”

Tatsuya responded only with a bitter smile. Tatsuya reflexively thought “I am struggling, compared to Yakumo,” but he had the good judgment to not stir up trouble by saying that.

“Not going to report to Kazama-kun?”

“I’m putting all my effort into my visit to the Main House today, so I’ll speak with him tomorrow.”

“I see. Well, good work.”

After that, they didn’t talk about anything in particular, and Tatsuya was dropped off in front of his house.



Tatsuya had told Yakumo that he was going to the Main House, but the place he was now heading to was actually the Kanto Branch of the Magic Association, in Yokohama. Upon calling the Main House in advance of his visit, he had been told that Maya was at the Magic Association, and he was to go there instead.

Leaving Minami in charge of the house while they were out, Tatsuya headed towards the Yokohama Bay Hills Tower with Miyuki, Fumiya, and Ayako in tow. That said, Tatsuya did not want to bring anyone else along, but the three had insisted (mainly Miyuki) and Tatsuya was unable to say no.

Having arrived at the Magic Association’s Kanto Branch, the four of them were escorted to the office’s most luxurious reception room.

Somehow, although Kouichi, Katsuto, and Shippou Takumi had come to have an online conference at the Kanto Branch, Maya had won the right to use this reception room by claiming ‘ladies first.’

“Well, looks like everyone’s all here. Welcome.”

The four of them were guided into the room where Maya greeted them, Tatsuya first. As she sat on the sofa, Hayama stood immediately at her back in

his usual manner.

Before he could be offered a chair, Tatsuya stood before Maya and bowed deeply.

“Mother.”

Aware of the fact that he was in the Magic Association, Tatsuya initiated conversation with Maya in a manner that outwardly emphasized their familial relationship.

“Please allow me to sincerely apologize that the recent mission ended in failure.”

Maya received Tatsuya’s apology with a smile.

“I already heard the full details of yesterday’s events. I don’t think that there was much you could have done about it, so I think it would be best that you don’t concern yourself with it too much, Tatsuya.”

“Thank you very much.”

Tatsuya bowed once, and that should have been the end of it — but Tatsuya knew things were not quite so simple.

“While it is unfortunate that you were unable to recover Gu Jie’s corpse... are you absolutely certain that he died?”

“Yes.”

Maya had told him not to concern himself too much, but what was she trying to say now?

Tatsuya concealed his wariness with a firm nod.

“I wonder, how did you confirm that it was Gu Jie’s body? There might be people who would want to know about that, so just to be sure, I’d like to ask in advance.”

There was no particular reason to be secretive about this.

“Based on the lesson we learned from when Zhou Gongjin mislead us with Ghost Walker, I developed a magic for tracking.”

“Despite that, up until yesterday you had quite some difficulty locating him.”

Tatsuya wondered if perhaps Maya was thinking that he had somehow been cutting corners.

“The usage conditions are limited, and during yesterday’s mission, I was finally able to deploy it.”

In a certain sense he had definitely been cutting corners. However, that was because he had a more important mission. This was not an excuse; Tatsuya truly felt this way in his heart, and so there was no guilt at all in his voice as he stated this.

“Conditions? What conditions?”

This, however, was a question he could not answer. No matter how hard he could try, Tatsuya could not detach himself enough to say, “I can’t use it unless I’m holding Miyuki.”

“...It has to do with my senses, so it’s difficult for me to explain.”

Tatsuya gave a hazy response, fully aware of how suspicious it was.

“My, how unusual. Well, that’s fine. Some things are just like that.”

Maya grinned as though amused. She was looking straight past Tatsuya, at the blushing face of Miyuki who was standing off to the side behind him.

She might have realized Tatsuya’s ‘secret condition’ just from looking at Miyuki’s facial expression.

“I wonder if I can ask you one more question.”

“What would that be?”

Maya had clearly been enjoying pressuring Tatsuya up until now.

But now, Maya’s smile became like a blade of icy steel.

“Was Toshikazu Chiba truly that difficult for you to handle?”

“...What do you mean by ‘that difficult’? He was certainly a tough opponent.”

“Well, it seems to me that you had quite a bit of trouble with an opponent that had no offensive options aside from melee combat. Furthermore, this opponent not have his specialized weapon device, thus rendering Tatsuya-san unable to demonstrate his real ability.”

Tatsuya felt a cold sweat on his back.

It was a matter of fact that if Tatsuya had not been needlessly emotionally attached to Toshikazu, he could have more quickly dispatched with him. He wouldn't have wasted so much time if he had not been led astray by his curiosity.

If it were pointed out that Tatsuya's actions had allowed Gu Jie to escape, it would be difficult for Tatsuya to totally deny this.

"He may have been unable to utilize his full strength, but Toshikazu Chiba's corpse was found to have a technique implemented on it by Gu Jie that temporarily augmented his magical power. This is merely a conjecture, but I don't believe that there were any mistakes."

Tatsuya had no intention of reporting this, but he let it slip in order to dodge the question.

"Temporarily augmented his magical power?"

Maya's gaze had turned sharp.

"The Sorcery Boosters used by No Head Dragon were developed based on Gu Jie's corpse manipulation techniques... I wonder if it's a similar technique."

Tatsuya realized his mistake, but he could no longer feign ignorance.

"Not quite, I don't think. I didn't see anything resembling the necessary external device."

"Then what do you think it was?"

"...If we assume that something like 'life energy' exists, I believe that it could be a type of technique that involves extracting that energy by killing the target, pulling the energy in the corpse, then converting that energy in order to gain control over the Psions."

"Hmm, life energy... How interesting. That particular type of magic is activated by carving into the corpse's heart, which is why you got rid of Chiba Toshikazu's heart, right Tatsuya-san?"

"—Yes, I'm afraid that's exactly why."

“Perhaps that magic was not observed at Kamakura because you had destroyed the hearts of the ‘generators’ in advance, I wonder.”

“That may be the case.”

Tatsuya hadn’t even realized that possibility, but when Maya pointed it out, it certainly seemed likely.

“A Sorcery Booster is a magical device made by processing a human brain. What you encountered, Tatsuya, was a magic amplification technique that used the target’s heart as a medium. Our research on this magic has been entirely focused on the mental aspect, but perhaps the key to understanding this magic actually lies in the physical body...”

An enigmatic flash of light crossed Maya’s eyes like a glint in the eyes of a mad scientist.

‘Please don’t tell me you’re going to experiment on human bodies...’ Tatsuya thought to himself, like a silent prayer.

As though his prayer was answered, or perhaps because she realized she was acting suspiciously, Maya suddenly reverted to her normal demeanor.

“Oh my, excuse me. I didn’t even realize. Tatsuya-san, Miyuki-san, Fumiya-san, Ayako-san please have a seat.”

Maya gestured for them to sit, and then spoke to Hayama without turning around.

“Hayama-san, please prepare tea for Tatsuya-san and his guests.”

“Understood.”

Hayama, who had been standing as still as a statue up until now, spoke respectfully as he gave a short bow.

While Tatsuya was being interrogated by Maya, the other three had found it difficult to even breathe.

With the tension between the two finally gone, Miyuki and the others were finally able to feel lively again, while sipping the tea served to them by Hayama.

But it was too early to totally let their guard down.

“I believe you’re already aware, but there’s an online conference between family heads soon.”

There was nothing unusual about that, by itself. It was something that not only Tatsuya, but the other three had already realized.

Online Master Clans Conferences’ were how the Ten Master Clans communicated, and there were two methods of attending: connecting remotely to the conference from one’s own home, or actually venturing out to the nearest Magic Association. The Kyoto Headquarters was conveniently located for the Ichijou Family and Futatsugi Family, and although Tohoku, Shikoku, and Kyushu lacked anything quite as nice as the Kanto Branch Office, they did have branch offices that were usable for online conferences.

It was possible that Kouichi and Katsuto were meeting just to settle yesterday’s affairs. However, if Shippou Takumi was visiting as well, it was only natural to assume that this was a special meeting of family heads.

“Once Mitsuya-dono is here, we can go ahead and get started with the conference.”

“Have any questions unrelated to the disposal of Gu Jie arisen?”

Maya gave a seemingly deliberate sigh in response to Tatsuya’s inquiry.

“Anti-magic activities are becoming more extreme. Up until now, what we observed have been extremist citizens unfairly attacking magicians, and we thought that if we left it alone, it would go away, but...”

Maya gave Tatsuya a fleeting glance.

“The organization attacking magicians is a suborganization of that “Blanche,” and although they are a radical organization that loathes magicians, they have been utilizing magic... for outside observers, this might have looked like an internal conflict among magicians. If seen from the viewpoint that normal citizens might get dragged into the conflict, it severely damages our image as magicians.”

Tatsuya almost groaned without realizing it.

What Maya was saying was unmistakably correct. The day before yesterday,

Tatsuya had to take care of some Egalite remnants near the First High School.

That man was not a magician; he was nothing more than a relay point for magic.

But Tatsuya couldn't prove that, and it was nearly impossible to explain.

The death of Gu Jie had brought a conclusion to the Hakone Terror Incident.

But the seeds of malice that he had sown were now beginning to sprout, and soon, they would bear new fruit.

(Continued in the next chapter "Prologue of Disturbance")

Chapter 15

“This concludes the report on the Hakone Terror Incident. I believe it is necessary, even for the National Defense Forces, to take the matter in which the USNA Military was easily permitted to intervene in domestic affairs seriously.”

“...Is that the opinion of the Ten Master Clans?”

“No. That is my own opinion, Lieutenant Colonel.”

“Understood. I believe your statements are quite correct, Special Officer, and they match my own. We shall propose this to the Brigade Commander.”

“Yes sir. Then, if you’ll excuse me.”

Remaining seated at his desk, the National Defense Army 101 Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Kazama Harunobu, dismissed his subordinate, the unregistered Strategic-Class Magician, Special Officer Ooguro Ryuuya, real name, Shiba Tatsuya. He then crossed his fingers together, shutting his eyes.

Tatsuya, who was normally supposed to be at school on a day like this, had come to the Headquarters of the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion, regarding the incident that occurred the night before last, when the mastermind’s death brought a temporary end to the incident — not an absolute total resolution — in order to provide a report regarding the details of the Hakone Terror Incident.

When the terrorist mastermind was holed up in a hospital near Zama Base, Tatsuya had come to handle it on behalf of the National Defense Forces. Because of the circumstances in which he had requested permission from Kazama to utilize magic that was designated a military secret, he had thought a report was necessary. Capturing terrorists was not the job of the military, so it was fine, even without a report, but Kazama was thankful to be able to hear the full details of the event from the person in question.

For Tatsuya, this mission was unrelated to the military. Despite this, it wasn’t quite the case that the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion was uninvolved in the incident. Kazama and the company were secretly involved with police

investigations designed to flush out supporters of foreign opposition forces that were lurking within the country.

Kazama and his comrades were also aware of the intervention of the USNA Military. Tatsuya had warned that a battle would occur in Zama, so it had been only natural to put that area under surveillance. That had been the only time the USNA regular troops had been active. But afterwards, it had been grasped to a certain extent that irregular covert operatives had also been running rampant.

It was entirely possible that the Hakone Terror Incident could have been resolved faster if the Independent Magic-Equipped Battalion had cooperated with Tatsuya's investigation. Gu Jie would have been unable to escape to the ocean, and there was a high probability that, at the bare minimum, his corpse would have been secured.

More importantly — the incident could have been resolved without the sacrifice of two talented police officers.

There was no end to the list of things that Kazama felt no pride in. All of these things existed within the realm of “what if?”

In reality, Kazama and his company had taken no assertive action towards resolving the incident, the terrorist mastermind had been buried in darkness by a USNA Military magician, and Inspector Toshikazu Chiba as well as his associate had died during the investigation. He had become a sacrifice for a vile technique that shamed even the dead.

The unbearable mood that hung over Kazama was because he knew that he bore at least some of the responsibility for the tragedy that befell Inspector Chiba and Associate Inspector Inagaki. Even without Kazama's involvement, the two inspectors had fallen into the necromantic magician's trap.

Though yet again, this was just an assumption.

In fact, the National Defense Forces had led Inspector Chiba right to the house where the wicked magician was hiding. Even if Kazama himself wasn't bothered by it, his subordinates certainly would be.

He knew this because First Lieutenant Fujibayashi was concerned for

Inspector Chiba's welfare, and had aggressively insisted on intervention to resolve the incident.



First Lieutenant Fujibayashi had been shocked. It was unimaginable for her because it was something that she had never seen coming.

Lieutenant Colonel Kazama had provided her with a recording of an oral report from Special Officer Ooguro Ryuuya regarding the Hakone Terror Incident for her to summarize into a written document. The verbal account given by Ooguro, that was to say Tatsuya, was highly logical and easy to summarize. In fact, it was so easy that she could have just put it into the speech recognition document processor, which would then complete the report. Speaking only about the difficulty of creating the document, it was something that could be completed in no time.

However, she still had yet to type even a single letter. She had thought it would be good to listen to the whole report first, but now she regretted it. If she had divided the task into smaller parts, she could have completed it while acting like she was just doing her job.

She didn't even feel like listening to the recorded data again. She didn't have the courage to.

Even without listening to it again, she could hear Tatsuya's voice echoing in her ears.

"—After Inspector Chiba's life was stolen away by Gu Jie, he was converted into a puppet, and I fought with him."

"—I believe the person who captured Inspector Chiba was an individual from a family of Ancient Magic users, Oumi Kazukiyo, who acted in collaboration with Gu Jie."

Fujibayashi had heard the name 'Oumi Kazukiyo' before. Now she would certainly never forget this name. Because it had been her who had lead Inspector Toshikazu Chiba to Oumi's residence.

Major General Saeki was the one who had proposed using the Hakone Terror Incident to guide the police to magicians suspected of being connected to

former Dahan or the Kunlunfang Institute, and then using their reactions in order to designate them as collaborators. Saeki's order was conveyed to Fujibayashi through Kazama, with her job being to disseminate the suspect list to informants and then follow up with them.

In the first place, it was sheer luck that Toshikazu Chiba had found a lead. Fujibayashi hadn't set him after anyone. Rather, she had simply told him "There are rumors that Oumi Kazukiyo has connections to a magician from Dahan." The one who had failed to leverage her advice was Toshikazu.

Even she understood that much.

The personal exchanges that she had with Toshikazu in the past was something she could not clearly explain.

Just before the outbreak of the Yokohama Disturbance in the fall of 2095.

Fujibayashi had fought alongside Toshikazu to clean up the agents of the Great Asian Union that were engaging in subversive activities in South Kanto.

In the end, they had been unable to defend against the Great Asian Union's invasion, but they did succeed in capturing numerous agents and collaborators.

To celebrate, the two of them had gone out to have a drink together.

Even before their celebration, the two of them had gone out together on a night investigation in the city.

Those memories now resided at the edge of her consciousness. She had forgotten them up until recently, but when she had reunited with Toshikazu the memories had suddenly become very vivid.

Fujibayashi and Toshikazu weren't in love.

They didn't even really have a 'man-woman' relationship.

Speaking objectively, they had gone on two or three work-related 'dates' together, so it was simply the case that they weren't complete strangers to each other.

Fujibayashi expected that Toshikazu had felt the same way.

Toshikazu was unaware that she had been promoted to First Lieutenant. It

seemed obvious to her that Toshikazu was just pretending to flirt with her, as part of a normal adult relationship.

Fujibayashi had yet to realize that that very way of thinking was actually proof that she was consciously aware of Toshikazu.

While she was a very wise woman, Fujibayashi had zero experience with romance.

Fujibayashi came from a prestigious family of ancient magicians; as a daughter of the Fujibayashi Family, her fiancé was decided for her by her parents. It was a childhood friend of hers, whom she was engaged to before she was even in middle school.

Fujibayashi was even more serious during her school days than she was now; she already had a fiancé, so she had never even gone on a date with another boy. Her childhood friend, who was the same age as herself, was more like family to her than a lover, so as a result, when they were together, she did not feel anything like passionate love for him.

However, Fujibayashi came to accept this feeling as natural. After all, he would become her real family.

Her fiancé was a man of peaceful demeanor, but he entered university at the National Defense Academy and eventually joined the Defense Force.

Fujibayashi had done nothing to stop him. As a prestigious magician, the idea that he should give everything for his country was ingrained into him. At best, all she had been able to do was laugh and jokingly say, “This doesn’t suit you, are you sure about this?”

Her fiancé had chosen the path of a technical officer, so in a certain sense, there was a good chance that he never would have seen action on the frontlines.

Her fiancé’s area of specialization was magical systems for enemy scouting. His first appointment had been in Okinawa.

He died there.

In 2092, there was a surprise attack by the Great Asian Union in Okinawa. He

was killed in a defensive battle.

That happened three months before their wedding.

Fujibayashi was filled with regret. Why had she not seriously tried to stop him from entering the military?

Fujibayashi, who had been pursuing a career in research up until then, suddenly began to pursue the path of a uniformed military office, but it was difficult for her to explain her state of mind.

She thought that perhaps she wanted revenge against the enemy that stole her fiancé from her.

Or perhaps, she just inherited her fiancé's duties.

Or perhaps, she simply wanted to comfort herself by putting herself in the same position that her fiancé had been in.

The military had taken her fiancé from her, so maybe she even wanted to exact revenge on it from within.

Regardless — Fujibayashi had never been able to forget about her deceased fiancé.

After that, she had gone out with a few men, but it never lasted long.

For several years now, her family had persistently attempted to get her into formal marriage meetings, but she always refused, citing her duties.

It was a matter of course that the National Defense Forces was full of men, but none of them ever approached her, perhaps intimidated by how distinguished she was.

After many years, the one person who had approached her without being intimidated by her ability or trying to take advantage of her prestigious family name... was Toshikazu Chiba.

Excluding her fiancé who died in battle, this may have been the first time she was ever approached like that.

—Ah, so that's why.

Fujibayashi thought such.

She had realized.

Now she understood why she felt so upset.

She had received the first report of Toshikazu's death just yesterday.

The reason she had been fine then was because the reality of his death had not hit her yet.

It was almost exactly the same as when she had heard that her fiancé had died.

She only began to feel the death of her fiancé when she attended a joint military funeral held in Okinawa, and had seen his picture among the photographs of the deceased.

In the same manner, Fujibayashi thought that she only truly started to realize that Toshikazu was dead when she listened to Tatsuya's account of how he died.

She was now upset as a result, and it threw her heart into disarray.

'I'm always too late,' she thought.

She had been too late to stop her fiancé from becoming a soldier.

She had been too late to stop Toshikazu Chiba from getting close to Oumi Kazukiyo.

She only ever realized her feelings when she had lost a companion.

—That included the fact that she had truly loved her fiancé.

—The fact that she felt something for Toshikazu Chiba that was more than simple goodwill.

A deep, deep sigh escaped from Fujibayashi.

No tears came. She felt no sorrow, only regret.

Fujibayashi faced her terminal, and began writing her report.

< End >



Ichijou Masaki Transfer Diary

February 10th, 2097 (Sunday)

I'm currently writing this diary entry in Tokyo. I'm not at a hotel, but at the secondary residence of the Ichijou Family.

Dad had this house built for the pointless reason that a member of the Ten Master Clans needed to have a house in Tokyo. I was only a child back then, but

I remember thinking that it was a waste, and indeed, it turned out to be. Although we owned it, it was almost never used. Besides, it was not hard to travel to Tokyo and be back in a single day these days, and there was rarely any work that would require staying overnight in Tokyo.

Ever since the invasion at Sado five years ago, Dad rarely went any long distance away from home. Mom and Dad were never absent from the house at the same time anymore. If Dad were to travel to Tokyo alone, a hotel is far more convenient. If he goes through the Magic Association, I think the security measures would be better that way as well.

That's why I once suggested that it might be better to sell the house in Tokyo. He replied saying that, "Even if we sold the house, there are a lot of items that needed to be removed from the premises and disposed of, that's too much work". Geez, not thinking before you act is the reason you struggle so much afterwards.

But one cannot always predict the future. I never thought that I would end up staying in the house in Tokyo for some time.

I don't feel uncomfortable about having to live in Tokyo though.

This might be inappropriate considering my reason for being here, but I'm a little excited.

The reason why I'm going to be living alone for some time is because I was given a mission from the Ten Master Clans, as the eldest son of the Ichijou Family.

That mission is to capture the leader behind the cowardly terrorist attack.

The terror incident that was carried out on the first of this month, at the hotel in Hakone during the Master Clans Conference. Because of that incident, there were 22 casualties and 34 injured people. A heinous crime that lead to many innocent people being involved in an attack on the Ten Master Clans. I will never forgive the culprit. Even if I hadn't been ordered, I wouldn't have been able to overlook this. In fact, I'm thankful that I was given the mission to find the mastermind behind the crime, and I am honored that I was chosen for the task by the Master Clans Conference. I will focus my efforts and see this mission through.

I was given the mission on the same day the attack was carried out, but now that it has started, I can feel myself getting tense.

It is undisciplined to think of such things before such an important mission. That is why, I will at least be honest with myself here. I can never show this side of myself in front of anyone else.

I will be attending First High School from tomorrow. This is thanks to Headmistress Maeda making a request to the Principal of First High.

I will study in the same school campus as *that person*.

Even though it is a short period of just one month, I can't help but look forward to it.

February 11th, 2097 (Monday)

Is this a dream?

I'm actually in the same class as *that person*!

Calm down. Calm down, me.

Now then.

Today was my first day at First High school.

My circumstances are a little special, as I'm not transferring or being admitted into this school.

At first, Father only intended to ask Principal Maeda to treat my absence due to my mission as an approved leave. Since the search area was expected to be around south Kanto, I would not be able to attend Third High. If it was only for a couple of days, that would not have been a problem, but that was not possible as I would be absent for several weeks.

My father still went to ask the Principal in person.

However, things didn't go so well.

That was only natural. After all, the title of the Ten Master Clans was not a

governmental office. Therefore, the mission given to me by the Master Clans Conference wasn't an official duty either. If leave of absence was approved for people even though it wasn't an official duty, people related to the Ten Master Clans could go on leave as much as they wanted.

There's no way the Principal would allow something like that.

However, Principal Maeda is not just a strict person. Although this might seem disrespectful, we students of Third High know that she is strict as well as compassionate. Although she tends to treat high school students like new army recruits, she is still very good at taking care of people. She even takes the time to teach Course 2 students, who are unable to receive personal training due to the lack of teaching staff, by giving excuses such as 'recreation' or 'outdoor activity'.

Even now, she has gone to a lot of trouble for the sake of a single student, me. The fact that I am a direct descendant of the Ten Master Clans, and the fact that she is a close friend of my father probably played no role in the matter. Principal Maeda must have understood that the task given to me was important, and to avoid adding to my worries, she had bowed her head to Principal Momoyama of First High.

As an exception, I am allowed to take the lessons of Third High from a First High classroom. The education system nowadays doesn't have a single teacher teaching an entire class; instead, each student can progress at their own pace using individual terminals. Even though there is leeway in the curriculum, there are limits. If the student unable to progress to a specified level in one year, they will fail that subject.

Even in a magical high school, lectures for both magic-related studies and regular subjects are taken through the personal terminal. So, while it would be impossible for practical classes and experiments, classroom lectures can still be taken without going to school. In theory.

However, the problem with this is that there are portions of the magic curriculum that are access restricted. Hence, there is a strict limit on how much a student can take home as reference material, and it is built so that information cannot be copied over a network. George once tried to break

through the protection just to check, and not only was he unable to break through, he was identified and got a sound scolding from the vice-principal, so it's probably not something that can be bypassed by a high school student.

That is why Principal Maeda paid attention to the closed network shared by the Magic High Schools and the National Magic University. The National Magic University and Magic High Schools exchange data over a network that is not accessible to outsiders. This system is the reason why Magic High Schools are able to view documents from the National Magic University.

Principal Maeda met with Principal Momoyama and made arrangements to access the Third High school server from the terminals meant for First High school use. Thanks to this, I was able to take the lectures of Third High from a First High classroom.

I will be taking remedial classes for the practicals and experiments over spring break. The fact that I won't get any vacation time is, well, it can't be helped. This is a special arrangement to keep me from failing a year so I can't ask for much more.

Come to think of it, I've been allowed to take part in First High's practical classes and experiments, thanks to the kindness of Momoyama-sensei. Although they won't count towards the completion of my course, but it's a rare and valuable opportunity to take part in the lessons of another school. Not just Maeda-sensei, I also can't thank Momoyama-sensei enough.

Due to these circumstances, I've - well, I can't call it 'transferred', perhaps 'enrolled' is a better word? - into First High.

Ah, this is getting complicated, so I suppose 'transferred' will suffice.

There might not be anyone else who retorts to himself in a private diary.

In the morning, when I went to the staff room to greet the teachers, the vice-principal personally guided me to the Principal's office. After that, instead of my class teacher, the vice-principal once again guided me to my classroom. I heard about this afterwards, but it seems there is no practice of conducting a morning assembly by the class teacher at First High. Even at Third High, the general

curriculum students don't have a morning assembly, but for the specialized course, the class teacher comes without fail every morning to encourage the students. Despite both being Magic High Schools, I guess things vary from school to school after all.

I was led to the classroom of Class-2A. There I was startled to see that person was also in this class.

Shiba Miyuki-san.

She is a beautiful and intelligent woman who was just recently appointed as the next head of the Yotsuba Family. She is a beauty and a magician, and also my goddess.

My friends at Third High will definitely laugh if I tell them this, but I truly think of that person as a goddess who has descended to Earth. Beauty? Although I said it myself, she cannot be described by a sullied word like that. If only I had a talent for poetry, I would spend my entire life trying to find a phrase elegant enough to describe her, but I am vexed at my boorish nature.

If anyone comes to know that I feel this way, they might say something like this: "If she's a goddess, and not just a pretty girl, how can you not feel anxious at the thought of dating her?" or something like that.

That is indeed the truth.

I used to think so too.

But I am a healthy high school boy. I want a girlfriend, but I can never settle for another girl after laying my eyes on her.

Besides, turning a goddess into your girlfriend, doesn't that give you a delicious sense of immorality? I can understand the feelings of the man who hid the mantle of the celestial nymph now.

Woah, I seem to have gotten a bit too excited.

In any case, I was startled after seeing her when I entered the classroom.

Even I was able to tell that my face was red from excitement and nervousness.

However, I could not allow myself to do something as pathetic as blush and mumble during my introduction. No matter what happens, I will not expose such an embarrassing side of me in front of her.

That is why I cheated a little.

The magicians from the former First Laboratory, whom the Ichijou Family are descended from, were given magic that disabled opponents by directly affecting their bodies.

The Isshiki Family uses magic that directly affects the nervous system. However, since there is the case where the Ichihana Family were demoted to extras, magic that controls the nervous system to control people is treated as taboo.

The Ichinokura Family uses magic that affects the body temperature.

And the Ichijou Family that I belong to, uses magic that affects that liquids inside the body. The fact that 'Rupture' could be used to destroy machinery was an unexpected side effect, that magic was initially developed to vaporize the liquids inside an enemy's body.

Being able to vaporize bodily fluids was not the only variation of the magic that affects body fluids. There is also a magic that can control the blood flow. I used that magic to ensure that excessive blood did not flow into the area under the skin of my face. The color of my face should not have changed.

Despite that, it didn't mean that my excitement had decreased, or I was any less nervous. It was difficult to make sure that I didn't fumble over the pronunciation of my words and kept from biting my tongue. Since I was focusing so focused on that, I can't recall exactly what I said.

I hope I didn't blurt and say anything strange.

Since nobody looked at me strangely after that, I assume it went well.

In fact, people were friendly and welcoming. First High and Third High are supposed to be rivals. I was prepared to be subjected to criticism, but I'm glad

that my predictions didn't come true.

It was a shame that I didn't get to talk to that person much. But I suppose that's only to be expected, since I didn't try and talk to her myself.

It's because I was lacking courage. I just thought it would leave a bad impression to be chasing after girls right after transferring in, so I held myself back. If I was in her place, I wouldn't want to go out with a skirt chaser either.

Due to that, I mingled with the boys of Class-A today.

The leader of the group of boys was Morisaki Shun. He's the eldest son of the Morisaki Family, known for their 'Quick Draw'. His results in the Nine Schools Competition were average, but he looked like he'd be fairly capable in a fight. I heard that he fought against members of the Cabinet Office's Information division and drove them off during summer in the year before last.

Apparently, he did that to protect an American woman who was being abducted due to some internal issues. I remember thinking that "This guy has got guts" when I heard about that incident. I also wondered why he wasn't arrested on charges of interfering with public affairs.

His friends were proudly boasting that he had been a member of the Public Morals Committee since his first year. Morisaki seemed to have a faint sense of distaste about the matter, I wonder what that was about?

The system of the Public Morals Committee is the same as that in Third High and actually, even I have been a member since my first year.

Although not to the same extent as a seat in the Student Council, being selected as a member of the Public Morals Committee is something to be proud of.

Speaking of which, I've heard that the representative of the new first-year students would normally be invited to join the Student Council. In Third High, they are invited into the Public Morals Committee. Perhaps the Public Morals Committee in First High doesn't have the same level of prestige within the school as that of Third High.

Third High does have a lot of troublemakers. If the Public Morals Committee wasn't strong, the school grounds would turn into a mess. In that regard, maybe

the Public Morals Committee is an exception.

I had lunch with Morisaki and the others, and they told me a lot of things about First High. It appears that the female students are ranked higher at First High right now. That trend seems to be especially prevalent in the second-year students, as I was told, “Don’t do anything that would make the girls target you” in a half-jesting manner.

During this time, I also came to know who the strongest second-year students are.

As expected, the Student Council President, Shiba-san is in a class of her own. Other than her, there’s Kitayama-san who is also from Class-A, known as the ‘Shadow Public Morals Committee Chief. ‘The annoying troubleshooter’, Akechi-san from Class-B. Satomi-san from Class-D, and Chiba-san from Class-F. These were some of the other names that came up.

They’re all female, as expected. I’ve heard about a lot of them during the Nine Schools Competition. Chiba-san is the only exception, but she is one to watch out for. We only worked together at Kyoto on the second day, but that was enough for me to realize that she was highly skilled.

She has a frightening air where you don’t know what will happen to you if you let your guard down.

However, I wonder what the ‘Actual head of the Public Morals Committee’-thing meant? The head should be Yoshida. The fact that Yoshida was competent should be clear from both the Nine Schools Competition and the incident at Kyoto. That Yoshida has been supplanted by someone as an ‘actual head of the Public Morals Committee’... maybe Kitayama-san was the person I should be the wariest of. It was a bit surprising, considering her child-like appearance.

Speaking of surprising, I was shocked when I was told that the Shiba guy was a Course 2 student during his first year. Course 2 refers to what we call ‘general studies’ at Third High, right? Which means that he entered the Nine Schools Competition during his first year in an environment where he didn’t have any teacher to guide him, and made us taste defeat.

After entering high school, having a teacher to guide you makes a big difference. Even a mere three months is enough to make a difference.

But he alone, was able to proceed far ahead of us. At least in the field of practical application of magic, he was far ahead of George as well.

Just what kind of education did he receive from the Yotsuba?

Although it was galling to admit, I felt a shiver run down my spine.

I also attended the first meeting regarding the mission today. Even though I called it a first meeting, we all knew each other. It was just the first time we had gathered to talk about the mission.

For this mission, the new head of the Juumonji Family, Juumonji Katsuto-san will be the leader, and the eldest son of the Saegusa Family, Saegusa Tomokazu-san will be the sub-leader. The plan was for the Juumonji Family and the Saegusa Family to coordinate in the search effort. I will be working under the command of Juumonji-san.

However, there is a risk that working in this fashion would lead to duplicating effort or something might get missed out due to the Juumonji and Saegusa Families carrying out their individual investigations. To be honest, I was worried about that. Though it seemed that everyone had already understood this.

There were arrangements made for Juumonji-san and the eldest daughter of the Saegusa Family, Mayumi-san to meet in Tokyo and exchange information regarding each other's progress. It appears that Shiba was participating in those meetings as a representative of the Yotsuba Family as well. Hence why Shiba invited me to participate in the meetings from today onwards.

Although receiving help from him gave me a strange feeling, I couldn't refuse. I replied that I would be attending. What do you think he replied after hearing that? He said, 'I'll send you the map, so take out your terminal'!

I felt like an idiot since I was prepared to be told, 'let's go then', but such a thing wouldn't happen normally. This guy told me, a person who was new to the city, that he would give me a map, and that I should come there by myself. Of course, I'd be fine by myself because I have my navigation application. But what's up with his sense of empathy?

As expected, I don't like that about him. I probably shouldn't think this way,

but I was able to relax when he said that he would decline the meal after the meeting was over.

For such a guy to be the elder brother, no, a cousin and fiancée of that person is wrong, no matter how you look at it.

February 12th, 2097 (Tuesday)

For the first period today, Class-2A had practical magic class. The assignment was “Defining the ending point of a magic”.

The goal is to define the active time of the magic as a variable, and change the color of a white plastic ball from red, green and blue in order, and repeat this for process for ten sets within thirty seconds. If you make a mistake on the settings for even one iteration, you will either run out of time towards the end or end up with extra time.

Hearing that, I thought “this should be easy”. Making a mistake with the ending condition of a magic will result in not being able to produce the desired effect during combinations of multiple attacks, and defending against an opponent’s attack. I thought that already I understood the importance of defining the ending conditions of magic.

On the other hand, the fact that ‘properly defining the ending conditions is essential’ is a fundamental idea in the continuous invocation of multiple magic, and is beaten into us within the first year at Third High. Certainly, we weren't asked to do anything so detailed, but I thought that this was actually too detailed to be of use in live combat.

The last practical assignment I undertook at Third High before transferring here was to hit a target placed behind a wall with magic. It is obviously training for magical attacks against opponents who are hiding behind obstacles.

Compared to that, I could only think of the assignment at First High as a superficial contest of dexterity.

This was a major mistake.

The practical class was carried out in pairs. When the teacher in charge asked us to pick the teams ourselves, I wanted to pair up with that person.

However, I'm an outsider here. There are an even number of students in Class-2A after including me. I should pair up with the last person who is left after the others finish pairing up.

As I thought that and looked around, for some reason nobody asked that person to pair up with them.

Was this okay?

It's okay, right?

Thinking that way, I hesitantly went up to that person and asked, 'would you like to pair up with me?'

That person smiled and nodded.

So far so good.

On her initial attempt, that person completed her ten sets in exactly thirty seconds. She wasn't even off by 0.1 seconds. I cannot deny that I saw this assignment as even more simple due to that fact.

I enthusiastically began the assignment while hearing that person do the countdown...

...and ended up finishing a whole 0.7 seconds too early.

The condition to clear this assignment is to finish within the allotted time with a margin of ± 1 second. 0.7 seconds might be within that limit, but the idea is to complete the assignment without any help such as a countdown of the seconds. Shiba-san actually completed the task in exactly thirty seconds without any sort of aid.

From the side, I heard a voice saying, "Exactly thirty seconds. Nice work, Honoka."

Along with getting even more depressed, I felt a strong sense of panic.

I somehow managed clear the requirements of 'complete the task with an error margin of ± 1 second without any external aid, within the first period, but it took me until afternoon to recover from the shock. Even so, it's not like I forgot about it. Even now, I still feel the self-loathing that arose due to naively assuming that Third High was more advanced than First High.

Something nice happened today as well. that is why I was able to get away with only this level of depression.

That person actually invited me to have lunch together. It was Mitsui-san who actually invited me, but that person said 'please join us', as well!

Although I feel that she was forced to say that, I don't care. That person looked at me and said 'Yes, please join us', while smiling! It's a pity I couldn't record that moment.

After I followed that person to the cafeteria, people I was familiar with greeted me while looking suspicious. They are the people I worked with together at Kyoto last year.

Yoshida, Saijou and Chiba-san. Although we spent only a short while together, I still remember them well. Especially Chiba-san, who left a strong impression.

Chiba-san was the first person to speak, saying "Huh?" Is it that strange to see me together with Shiba-san?

But that guy who should be feeling the most uncomfortable with me with regards to Shiba-san approved of my sharing their table without a second thought, and dispelled the uncomfortable atmosphere.

It wasn't strange that he didn't object to me sharing their table. I don't think there is any male who can go against that person when she asks for something. What was strange was the fact that Yoshida and Saijou, the quiet-looking young girl who was wearing glasses rarely seen in this age, and even Chiba-san, made an expression like it was okay because he said so.

I thought he was the type of guy who would be shunned by his classmates.

I was sitting in front of that person. It took a lot of control to put on a normal

face, as I could feel my heart racing, which was unlike me.

This group probably always has lunch together. I thought that since I am a stranger here, I should go out of my way to make conversation to keep the mood from turning unpleasant.

However, I felt that I would not be able to stay calm if I saw that person's face, while another side of me was thinking that I didn't want to waste even a single moment where I could look at her directly, so I didn't have the composure to start a conversation by myself.

While I was in that predicament, Chiba-san asked me about the progress of the mission.

I almost spit out my miso soup. No, there's no way I can make a mistake like that while sitting in front of that person. I desperately swallowed what was inside my mouth.

Seriously, though, she's such an unreserved woman, asking about that in a place where anyone can overhear us. Does she not realize how important this is? She didn't appear to be that careless.

However, I also felt that this was a good chance. The fact that neither Shiba-san nor that guy tried to stop Chiba-san probably means that it is okay to talk about the mission with these people as long as I didn't go into the details. It was a good chance for me to begin a conversation with these people, since I had just transferred in and we didn't share any topics of interest.

But that bastard. He suddenly cut in on the conversation. He even called me 'a very gifted magician'! What did he hope to gain by giving such obvious flattery?

But after that, the conversation took a weird turn. That person actually said she was 'jealous' of me, and I became almost incapable of thinking about anything else. Was she praising me? Or was she just being polite?

Was she really jealous of me? Even after all this time, I still don't know what she meant.

Besides, Mitsui-san was energetically talking to that guy, and I didn't have a chance to get a word in.

Does Mitsui-san like him?

I know that love isn't based on logic, but isn't it better for her sake to stop her?

But thanks to that, I was able to talk to that person a lot without him interfering. Unfortunately, I can't really remember what we talked about, but I should have managed to reduce the distance between us a little.

Maybe I should be thanking that guy.

Or should I be boastful and say, 'Serves you right'?

I feel that neither is the correct answer.

February 13th, 2097 (Wednesday)

Perhaps I was too excited at being able to attend the same class as that person.

Although I had no intention of neglecting my mission, I am reflecting on the fact that perhaps I wasn't being serious enough.

In the meeting that was convened that evening, I was forced to consider this after hearing that guy's report.

It seems that he was only a step away from capturing our target last night.

Since he didn't manage to capture him after all, nothing came out of it. I probably thought that way because I was a third-party who didn't participate in the investigation of the terrorist attack.

But compared to me who hadn't managed to find a single lead regarding the terrorist, that guy actually managed to reach the hideout of the terrorist. I can't use the excuse that it has only been three days since I came to Tokyo. Or rather, I don't want to. That's because I don't even know where to start.

I had fun at school today as well. I felt happy that I was able to see that person's smile. I realized that I was elated due to such a thing, and felt like I had cold water poured over me.

I felt like running out of the house that instant, and searching for the target.

But running around randomly is useless, and will only serve to make me tired. I retained enough common sense to understand that much.

To begin with, I should think about what I can do. Dad said I could use the resources of the Ichijou Family as I saw fit. Even though he needed people to keep watch over our home territory, he assigned a non-trivial number of people over here as well.

I'll go to take a look at the site of the incident tomorrow. The Saegusa, Juumonji and Yotsuba Families have probably already done a detailed investigation, and what's more, the police have also probably scoured the area for clues.

Even so, maybe I can think of something if I go to the scene of the incident.

I thought that this was no time to be attending school.

But that would be equivalent to betraying Principal Maeda, who went to so much effort to get me transferred to First High.

I'll stay quiet until after school tomorrow. Once school is over, I'll start investigating at once.

I came to Tokyo because I was entrusted with this mission, after all.

February 14th, 2097 (Thursday)

True to my resolve from last night, I also intended to have lunch alone.

Since I knew that my determination would weaken if that person called out to me, I stood up immediately after the third period ended to go to the cafeteria before she had the chance.

As planned, I would leave the classroom before Shiba-san could talk to me.

If not for that hindrance.

I got as far as the first row of seats in the classroom, when two girls suddenly blocked my way and called out, "Ichijou-kun".

Even before I had the chance to recall who they were, each of them pushed a small box decorated with a ribbon onto me. Along with the sentence, "Please

accept this!”.

Before I could reply, the two of them left the classroom in high spirits while saying "kyaa~ kyaa~"

I must have had a dumb look on my face. At that moment, I really had no idea what just happened. The small boxes were neatly wrapped and carefully decorated with a ribbon, so I could only guess that they were presents of some sort, it was impossible to mistake them for anything else. But what were the presents for? In my dumbfounded state, I wasn't able to realize.

While I was in a state of shock, the number of presents in my arms increased to seven. All of them were given to me by girls. They were all saying stuff like “not fair for only you to do it” and “me too”, but I still couldn’t understand what it was about.

That person’s voice brought me back to normal.

When she said I was very popular with a voice that seemed amused, as she stood behind me, I felt an intense sense of guilt.

I turned around hesitantly.

Her smile was dazzling today as well.

Even so, my heart was filled with impatience. Even now, I don't know what I was so impatient about.

It appears that I had said something. Perhaps a single word like “What” or “Why”.

That is probably why Kitayama-san looked at me with an expression of surprise.

She then told me, “Today is Valentine’s Day.”

To me, that sounded like judgement from Enma.

After thinking about it, I realized that today is February 14th.

I didn't realize it because my head was full of thoughts about the mission, but today is indeed Valentine’s Day.

In that case, I belatedly realized, the boxes which were wrapped in a variety

of colors could only contain Valentine's Day chocolate.

I wonder how people saw me, standing with my arms full of them?

How did that person see me?

I must have been sweating a lot from shame at that time.

When she said that it looked like the quantity would still increase, her words sounded like the trumpet of an angel announcing the end.

After that, in spite of my resolve from yesterday, I accompanied Shiba-san and the others to the cafeteria. No, was it Mitsui-san who forcefully dragged me there? Though that was no consolation.

Of course, I left the Valentine's Day chocolates in the classroom.

As a boy, I would be sad if I didn't get a single chocolate from a girl on Valentine's Day. Even if it was only obligatory, receiving chocolate will make me feel relieved.

But this year is different. Having other girls forcefully give me chocolates in front of the girl I had a crush on felt like I was lying on a bed of nails. I wanted to forget that as soon as possible.

However, Chiba-san reopened my wounds as soon as we reached the table.

How many chocolates did I receive? Huh?

That's none of her business.

"Talking about chocolates today can only mean Valentine's Day chocolates, right?" Really?

Yeah, that's right, goddamn it.

"I'm betting the number is in double-digits." Really?

Considering the circumstances, I think I would be forgiven even if I harbored some ill intent towards Chiba-san.

I understand. She is only partially to blame. To the boys, the chocolates we receive are kind of like medals. Having someone say that I probably received a

lot would usually not make me feel bad.

But today was an exception. Replying, “Why does it matter how many I received” after she incessantly kept asking was without a doubt my true feelings. I silently prayed for her to move away from that topic.

If only I was that fortunate.

Kitayama-san and Mitsui-san told everyone the number of chocolates I had received.

Ah, I know that I’m only imagining the slight. I’m probably too self-conscious.

But at that time, I was scared to look at the face of that person.

To forget the unpleasant memories related to Valentine’s Day, I ran around until nearly midnight looking for the terrorists after the meeting had ended.

In the end, it was a fruitless exercise.

The search was fruitless as well.

Huh.

I guess I’ll definitely be lacking sleep tomorrow.

February 15th, 2097 (Friday)

The thing we had Magicians feared ever since the terrorist incident, finally happened.

Or perhaps I should say it has starting to happen.

A group of demonstrators clashed with the police.

There was stone-throwing and fighting. If the police had failed to contain them, it was easy to predict that the target of the mob would have changed from the police to ordinary magicians. It is not unreasonable to imagine that students of the magic schools might be attacked as well. I began to worry for my friends from Third High.

To distract myself from this bad premonition, I started a conversation regarding the large number of arrests that were made, that had just been

reported on the news. The news reported that twenty-four people were arrested, and I am unsure if that is too many or too few. Ever since the invasion at Sado, demonstrators and right-wing activists in Western Japan against the national army have completely gone to ground, so I haven't heard of any arrests taking place in recent times.

He replied, "There has been a lot of them lately".

So the issue is getting worse as I thought.

Shiba estimated that the number of demonstrators shown on television was around two hundred. Indeed, it was around that many. Then the total count might be twice that number, or maybe even more. Perhaps there were as many as five hundred demonstrators.

First High was enveloped in a dark mood this afternoon. It makes the cheerful atmosphere of yesterday seem unreal.

If this was Third High, I could have encouraged my classmates. Even if I don't say anything, I can think of many people who would say things like "If the demonstrators attack us, let's send them packing!". However, it seems that First High doesn't have many characters like that.

After coming home from the usual meeting, I made a phone call to George. I was worried about the state of affairs at Third High.

As expected, it seems that the mood at Third High was pretty belligerent. George was laughing about how more people were injured during club practice than usual.

Those guys are all hot-blooded. But it seemed that Third High was still the same as usual, so I was a little relieved.

If anything, George was worried about me. He asked me if the mission was not going well as if he had realized it already. At times like this, the visiphone with its video call capability is inconvenient. It's not possible to hide anything.

But this might be a blessing in disguise. Even though it had been less than a week since I came to the capital, I was indeed at a dead end. I don't know what I was supposed to do.

I summoned my courage and told George everything about the current situation. After thinking for a while, George gave me a piece of advice that I didn't even think of.

It's better to stop trying to compete at searching for the enemy. Indeed, it's impossible for me to equal the Saegusa and Juumonji Families at a search in the Kanto area which is their home ground. It's not that I'm trying to make excuses, the difference in available resources is too great.

I seem to have become impatient after seeing Shiba's accomplishment of getting within striking distance of the target at Zama. I must have really lost my composure, to not even notice that. Although I don't want to use it as an excuse, perhaps I had been thrown off balance by the unfamiliar environment.

George told me that my turn would come once the enemy had been found. Since the search effort requires manpower and connections, I can leave that to the Saegusa and Juumonji Families to some extent. Once the terrorist has been found, pursuing and taking him into custody is my job.

George thought that I needed to understand my role in this way.

If I don't do anything until the target is discovered, there is no point in me living alone in Tokyo. Even though I cannot accept George's advice fully, it made me feel better.

George must have told me to "stop competing" for this reason. Geez, he's such a dependable friend.

February 16th, 2097 (Saturday)

I learned about the incident at Second High during the meeting in the evening.

The shock I experienced during Valentine's Day was replaced by the bad news yesterday, and after speaking to George last night, I calmed down enough to once again be capable of enjoying my daily life with that person. I think I managed to get rid of the awkwardness in my speech while speaking to that person and my other classmates.

After spending the relatively enjoyable life of a transfer student, I put together the information concerning the mission gathered by father's subordinates instead of running around, and headed to the meeting.

Once there I heard the news that students of Second High had been assaulted by Humanists.

I don't think I was taking the situation lightly. However, the circumstances were getting worse a lot faster than I had imagined.

I didn't imagine that the people who were against magicians would directly attack them without even trying to make it look like an accident.

No, even if such an incident was to occur, I expected it would be much further ahead in the future.

The students of Second High who were assaulted by the anti-magic faction seem to have taken pretty serious wounds.

It would be fortunate if they didn't suffer any lasting effects due to this incident.

Saegusa-san was pretty worried. Since she is the former Student Council President of First High, she was worried about the students of First High being targeted by people who preached Humanism.

I am also worried about that as well.

If the anti-magic faction wants to target someone, First High would be a better choice than Third High. Even though it is removed from the center of the city, attacking First High in Tokyo would leave a stronger impression.

No matter how strong the magician, they are physically just ordinary humans. If they are taken by surprise and attacked, the worst case may also happen.

Although I am worried about that person, I am also worried about my home. Although I don't think anything serious will happen since my father is on the lookout.

February 17th, 2097 (Sunday)

Today, I stayed at home all morning and analyzed the data brought in by my father's subordinates who were helping with the search. Since a lot of it was obtained when I wasn't around, listening to the explanations again would help me understand if I had any misconceptions, so it was useful to do so.

The main point of the discussion was regarding the estimated route taken by the terrorist to make his escape.

We already knew that the freighter used by the terrorist to sneak into the country was anchored at Numazu Harbor. However, this is probably a decoy. I don't think he'll really use it if he tries to escape from Japan.

Everyone else was of the same opinion.

Even so, he probably didn't intend to remain hidden in Japan. At some point, he would definitely try to escape. Everyone agreed on this point as well.

In that case, did he intend to leave by air, or by sea? If he planned to leave by air, he could disguise himself and board a plane. Or he might have prepared a small plane for himself. Sagami Bay, or the Bōsō Peninsula? It was also possible that he was secretly travelling north to some place like Niigata from where he could escape to the continent.

Although we were able to think of several routes, we didn't have the manpower to cover all of them. As expected, the consensus was that we should be cautious and keep ourselves for when the Saegusa and Juumonji Families find the target.

Even though that was probably the best choice, I found it hard to just keep waiting, maybe because I'm young.

In the afternoon, I travelled all the way along the coastline from Irouzaki to Inubousaki by bike. Although I was just passing through, I thought it helped me become familiar with the lay of the land. More than anything else, it was refreshing and was a good change of pace.

However, even though it helped my mood, I still had nothing that I could do. Although I don't really want to get him caught up in the affairs of our house, I called George again after dinner. George is the best person to talk to about matters like this after all.

George is of the opinion that making the terrorist reveal himself is the best way to break out of this situation. In short, we need to lure him out.

Just like the terrorist is using the freighter at Numazu as bait, we too need to prepare a bait that will let us reel him in.

The problem is, who to use as bait. George said, “Although I think you’ll disagree”, and mentioned the names of Shiba-san, Saegusa-san and Saegusa-san’s younger sisters.

I can understand the logic behind using women as bait. However, I would definitely not agree to expose that person to danger on purpose.

In return, George was against the idea of me acting as the bait. George said it was too dangerous, but there is always an element of risk when carrying out a sting operation. After hearing me reply in that manner, George reluctantly said that he would put together a more concrete plan.

I’m counting on you, Strategist.

February 18th, 2097 (Monday)

To think that person would actually be attacked!

I’m not exaggerating, when I heard the news I thought that my heart would stop.

Saegusa-san is the one who informed me that Shiba-san had been attacked. She contacted me to let me know that she would be inviting Shiba-san to today’s meeting as well, to discuss that issue.

Saegusa-san’s sister had been attacked as well, but I heard that neither of them had been injured. Even so, until I saw her unharmed at the French restaurant where we held our meetings, I remained anxious.

When I saw Shiba-san show up there with him as an escort, I felt relieved as well as a prick of pain in my chest.

I was immediately aware of what that was.

It was jealousy.

Intending to wipe away that pitiful emotion, I asked Shiba-san if she was okay.

Although I felt jealous, I think my concern regarding her safety was more important. When she said that nothing serious had happened, I felt all the tension leave my body.

When the incident took place, I was already on my way back from school. One of my father's subordinates said he was going to visit an informant who worked under Zhou Gongjin, so I was headed there. I didn't expect to gain any leads. I just thought that moving around in an overt fashion would cause the mastermind of the terrorist incident to take notice of me.

I have nothing else to write here regarding that issue. It's just that, when Shiba-san was being attacked, I was not in a place where I could save her. It must have been the same for that guy as well. Shiba must have left school even earlier than me to work on the search effort.

Even so, Shiba appeared to save that person when she was being attacked by ruffians.

I didn't ask him how that was possible.

I was very interested in how he managed it, but I was hesitant to hear the reason.

Instead, I asked about the identity of the attackers.

The opponents were a national-level anti-magic group, and not just Antinite, they had guns and even used magic.

Actually, regarding the magic, the person who attacked Shiba-san and the others, it was just used as a relay by an ancient magician who took control of him. If what he said was true.

When I asked about the person who was doing the controlling, he replied that he had recorded the magic, and was having it examined.

Is such a thing possible?

Do the Yotsuba possess such techniques?

Along with being shocked, at some level, I was also reassured.

The reason why he is ahead of me when it comes to working on the mission is due to the secret techniques of the Yotsuba Family. If I think that way, I don't have to feel like I am losing to him. I don't need to worry if I am inferior to him.

I was thinking in such an underhanded way.

When I asked him how he managed to make a recording of the magic, he didn't reply.

That was obvious. The Ten Master Clans are competitors as much as they are collaborators. If a family makes a technique public so that other magicians can use it as well, their value will increase. Their influence in the magic society will also increase. If they are hiding it, that means they have good reason for doing so, and there is no way they would reveal it just because someone asked.

However, I felt that it was not the only reason why he didn't reply. I felt like he had seen through my thoughts.

Maybe I'm just thinking too much. I'm sure that's all there is to it.

However, I apologized in advance to keep him from saying anything.

It was entirely unlike me. To prevent myself from showing such a shameful side of myself again, I resolved to remain as a listener.

However, he asked if we intended to use that person as bait, when Saegusa-san proposed to give her an escort.

He asked that question to me.

No! I won't let anyone make her do something like that! If someone needs to act as bait, then I'll do it!

I rejected his suggestion loudly.

Since we had discussed the plan of me acting as bait to lure the terrorist out before Shiba's arrival, Juumonji-san came to my defense.

It seems he didn't really suspect me in the first place, but having him say something like that is enough to get on my nerves.

Even if it was a joke, I felt shame for having such a suspicion cast upon me.

All of this is because the mission is not progressing.

I resolved to go ahead with the sting operation, even if the Ichijou Family had to carry it out themselves.

Because I spent my time thinking of such things, it is unfortunate that I wasn't able to enjoy the dinner with that person. However, the mission takes priority right now.

I'll start making up a plan with George tomorrow, right after school.

I actually want to call him this instant, but it's already late today.

February 19th, 2097 (Tuesday)

At any rate, I'm tired.

Since the date has already changed, I'll leave writing the diary for tomorrow.

February 20th, 2097 (Wednesday)

School is temporarily closed until Saturday. The First High that I transferred to was closed since yesterday, but Third High is also closed from today so I was at home since morning.

The mission had been finished for the most part by yesterday. It's unfortunate that I can't say that it has been completed or taken care of completely, but I don't have to stay in Tokyo any longer.

I have been attending First High for a little more than a week. I have been able to attend the same class as that person for just less than ten days. Although I feel very regretful, I came to live alone in Tokyo for the sake of the mission as a member of the Ten Master Clans. It's obvious that I will have to return to Kanazawa once my mission is complete.

I'm sure my father will send word for me by today to return home. In the meanwhile, I'll summarize the things that happened yesterday.

Yesterday morning, I was sitting at my terminal in Class-2A of First High, and

was working on my studies.

Alone.

Although First High was temporarily closed since yesterday, I was still considered a Third High student. I was just using a terminal at First High. So logically, I should be attending the lessons.

I'm sure the school building will be closed. It would be nice if it was closed. As I went to school while praying for it to be closed, the teacher in charge of 2-A came to meet me. It seemed that even though the school was closed to students, the same was not true for the teachers.

Thanks to the teacher, I was attending the lecture all alone in the classroom. Although there is an often-used phrase that says "Small acts of kindness can bring discomfort to others", I felt that this was more in the category of "Great acts of kindness can bring great discomfort to others".

I was happy when I got to meet that person in the middle of my lesson when she came by to pick up something she had forgotten, though.

In the afternoon, it was confirmed that Third High would be temporarily closing as well. When I received that notification on my terminal, I decided to immediately return to my temporary residence, and tried to get in touch with George who should have also gone home after lessons were cut off in the afternoon.

However, George was unfortunately not at home. The matter is not something that could be discussed when the other person wasn't at home either. I decided to leave a message and wait for his call.

I received a call after 2:00 PM.

However, the caller wasn't George.

Shiba Tatsuya. That guy.

I think the reason why I wasn't surprised by what he told me was because I had an inkling as to what he wanted to say.

He told me that he had discovered the location of the terrorist, so he wanted

to begin the operation of capturing him.

He didn't say "Do you want to participate?" or even "Please participate".

He just told me the time and place to meet.

I felt that was enough as well.

Regardless, just how on Earth did the Yotsuba Family manage to obtain that information? I understood that I shouldn't ask about that, so I refrained from asking him. I felt that I had come to understand the threat of the Yotsuba Family who were said to be in a different class, "Untouchable", even within the Ten Master Clans.

The mission began at 6:00 P.M. in the evening.

At first, I was told to take the troops from the Ichijou Family and block off the escape route towards the north.

However, I wanted to pursue the target.

In the end, as if they were humoring my selfish request, I was put into a detached unit of the Juumonji Family.

That guy was also in the same unit.

That just served to fire me up all the more.

The car that contained the ancient magician who was our target came towards the place where we were waiting, as planned.

However, instead of turning towards the harbor, the driver turned the car towards the west.

We began pursuit, but as soon as we left the harbor, we ran into an ambush laid by a subordinate of the terrorist.

I was impatiently thinking that our target would get away while we were fighting against this guy, but Shiba said that he would deal with him and we should go ahead.

I can't say that I was not conflicted. Was it really okay to leave him to deal with this alone, while I took all the credit for taking out our target?

But it was also true that we needed to hurry. I left Shiba to deal with the attacker and set out to pursue our target.

Although it was that guy's magic that enabled us to find the location of the terrorist, we were luckily able to find the target's car immediately.

There can be no doubt, since he saw us in pursuit and increased his speed.

At one point, the car carrying terrorist took a turn and drove into a sandy area.

Over here, we were once again ambushed.

We took a fierce attack from behind with high-powered rifles meant to be used against magicians. This was beyond the means of a regular terrorist. At this point, I started to wonder if the terrorist attack in Hakone was planned by the Great Asian Union.

It was a fierce fight, but thanks to Juumonji-san rushing over to help, we were able to suppress the enemy.

Or so we thought, but then the enemy self-destructed.

We were completely held up by them and I was half-ready to give up on the chase.

No, I was willing to pursue the enemy until the last of my strength, but the target had already escaped into the ocean.

I started to think that we could no longer reach him.

I didn't expect that Saegusa-san, who had been excluded from the operation because it was dangerous, would show up on a high-speed patrol boat.

It was the kind of plot twist you see in movies.

But it would be the height of arrogance to criticize her, because this was convenient for us.

We boarded the patrol boat and chased the target down until we were just another step away from capturing the target.

However, we were unable to capture the terrorist.

The ship carrying the target was sunk in front of our eyes.

It was cut in two by a large magical blade.

Was that, Molecular Divider?

Why did the USNA magician unit's trump card appear now of all times?

At the time, I was completely unable to understand the situation.

No, even now, I don't understand the situation.

At any rate, we failed our mission in the final moments.

Although I believed that the target had definitely perished, since we couldn't find his body, we could not report the same to the mass media through the police.

In the end, the Hakone terrorist incident has drawn to a close on the surface.

The main offender has died.

However, the incident has not been resolved.

Now that I think about it, even though I had participated in the chase, I have no idea what the target looked like. His name was Gu Jie, he was an ancient magician formerly affiliated with Dahan, and he specialized in using magic that controlled corpses. I only know such fragmented details about him, and can't put together the whole picture of the opponent.

If I was asked if an ancient magician called Gu Jie really existed, and if he was really the mastermind behind the terrorist incident, I cannot confidently answer in the affirmative.

It would be very difficult to satisfy the mass media at this rate.

I was assailed by an extraordinary sense of resignation Even though I spoiled myself by being lazy until after 9:00 A.M., I still can't get rid of this feeling of having wasted my efforts.

It's good that I don't have to go to school.

I'll spend this one day to relax.

In the evening, I received a phone call from my father.

Against my expectations, he told me to not come back home yet. Since there might be some cleanup to do regarding the incident, he asked me to take care of it should the need arise.

Don't be ridiculous!

For something like that, Dad can just come to the capital when needed.

It's not like we live on the other side of the world.

Besides, school is closed only for this week. When I asked him what to do about school, he told me to continue attending First High as planned until the beginning of March.

Just what is he thinking?

Just what does Dad want to make me do?

I don't understand. I feel like my brain is not working properly due to fatigue.

I'll talk to my father again tomorrow.

February 21st, 2097 (Thursday)

Since I was tired yesterday, I postponed complaining to my father.

That was a mistake.

When I called him today, he persistently said that the discussion was settled yesterday.

So it's like that. Rather than him plotting something, he doesn't feel like taking care of the cleanup. Using the excuse that I was already in Tokyo, he didn't intend to leave Kanagawa.

True, no one would want to deal with the consequences of a failed mission like this time. But it's the same for me! Geez, he just says what he wants.

What's more, Dad dropped a massive bomb on my lap.

Akane would come to stay over on Saturday, so I was supposed to show her

around Tokyo on Sunday?

I don't know any of the tourist spots here, either!

February 22nd, 2097 (Friday)

Although I feel like there is no point writing this in my diary after all this time, I have two younger sisters.

The older of the two is called Akane, and the younger one is called Ruri.

As per the custom of my mother's family, it was decided to give girl children names based on colors.

I don't think we siblings get along well.

Although George would say that "they are very close", I personally don't feel that way.

They were cute in the past. Even now, I would definitely protect them if something were to happen.

But those two, even though they appear cute, they don't act like it at all.

Ruri doesn't talk to me at all. Although she has always had that tendency, recently she ignores me even when I talk to her. Once in a while, when she opens her mouth, she says horrible things that make me feel like asking her to shut up. There's no way we can have a proper conversation.

In contrast, Akane talks too much. She just talks too much. She insults me every time we see each other. She also barges into my room with tea, coffee or snacks even though I never ask her to bring any, and says abusive things like 'perverted', 'so gross' and 'untidy' until she's satisfied, before leaving.

A friend of mine from Third High said "so tsundere" with a happy expression, but he can only laugh about it because he's not on the receiving end. In the first place, Akane never showed me her 'dere' side, and I'm not the kind of person who would be happy because their younger sister showed them a 'dere' side either.

That noisy sister of mine will be coming to this house tomorrow.

Thanks to that, I had to look up all the tourist spots in this area in detail.

If I'm not properly prepared, Akane will definitely make a fuss.

I'm not delicate enough to feel hurt by Akane's abusive language, but I'd rather not have things become depressing.

Once you start looking into tourist spots, it really doesn't end.

Even the recommended course has a number of destinations that cannot be counted on both hands.

In such a situation, it would be good to get advice from a local person.

I also thought about calling that person to ask for advice.

However, I lacked the courage to do so. I couldn't dare to disturb her over something so trivial.

Feel free to laugh. Courage and recklessness are different things.

Asking that guy is out of the question. I don't want to feel indebted to him over something like this.

Yoshida and Saijou are easy to talk to, but would either of them know tourist spots that a female middle schooler would enjoy?

After thinking about it for a while, I decided to rely on Saegusa-san. Not the eldest son, Tomokazu-san, but Mayumi-san. I had been meeting with her every day until a couple of days ago, and I thought that she might know of some places that Akane would enjoy.

Saegusa-san indeed gave me the information I needed.

But right now, I'm regretting relying on her a little.

Since it felt like calling her out of the blue would seem too familiar, I sent my query to her over mail.

My younger sister has suddenly decided to come to Tokyo. I have to show her around this place the day after tomorrow, so please give me some advice on where I should take her. The contents of the mail were something to that effect, in a suitably polite language.

Her reply arrived within thirty minutes. I'm glad she replied so quickly, but I

belatedly realized that the National Magic University must be operating as usual, unlike the affiliated High schools.

My guess was not off the mark.

Her reply mail said, “I didn't go to college in the morning because I had to deal with a lot of people regarding the cleanup of the incident. I was free from the afternoon since I finished all the work, so I’m glad you sent me a mail.” I copy pasted her reply so there’s no mistake.

Was Saegusa-san someone I was that close to? I wondered, tilting my head.

Her message continued on to say that she definitely wanted to help me out, and wanted to hear about it in more detail, so could we meet now, preferably at her house? That was the gist of her message.

Me, go over to the Saegusa’s house?

Although I felt that this was pretty sudden, I immediately reconsidered.

Come to think of it, I haven’t gone to greet the Saegusa Family or the Juumonji Family even though I came all the way to Tokyo.

As the eldest son of the Ichijou Family, this is not acceptable. Since it seemed like Dad intended to have Akane’s husband take over as head of the family, I was not in a position of a successor, but it is also true that I am here as a representative of the Ichijou Family. We are all from the Ten Master Clans, and what’s more, I’m intruding upon their territory.

Besides, although it ended in failure, we had cooperated during an important mission.

I decided to take advantage of her invitation to go make my greetings to the Saegusa Family.

I did consider wearing a suit, but in the end I changed into my Third High school uniform and went to the Saegusa Family House using public transport, instead of my bike. On the way, I purchased an appropriately expensive gift as well. Since it was a formality, I didn't put too much thought into the appearance of the gift. My mother said that the price is often just as important as the appearance.

Maybe because I had sent her a mail about when I would be arriving, Saegusa-san was waiting to receive me when I arrived at the mansion.

Since the head of the family, Mr. Kouichi was present at home, I decided to greet him first. He certainly gave the impression that you couldn't let down your guard around him.

However, he didn't seem like the type of person who would betray his allies on a whim, unlike what Dad said. Rather than a person without honor, he seemed to be the type of man who had his own rules and gave them the highest priority. Or maybe I am just not capable of judging people yet.

The eldest son, Tomokazu-san, was not at home. According to Saegusa-san - since it will be confusing here, I'll refer to her as Mayumi-san for now - both of her elder siblings lived in separate houses.

After finishing my greetings to Mr. Kouichi, I was taken to a different drawing room. Although my own house is big, the Saegusa mansion might be even bigger. Although it seemed like our house had more floor space, it probably lost when it came to overall size.

The drawing room where I met with Mr. Kouichi had a sofa set, but the drawing room that Mayumi-san took me to had an elegant table and chairs arranged in a manner to allow people to dine there. Perhaps she intended to have a formal tea party. I wonder if my sisters will want to do things like this at some point as well.

The tea table had been fully set in the time while I was making my greetings to Mr. Kouichi. Mayumi-san offered me black tea and tea cakes in a natural manner, and enthusiastically asked me questions about Akane's age and interests.

In the beginning, I thought she was a kind person. But as time progressed, I understood the truth. Wasn't she just bored? Did she call me over just to stave off her boredom?

This drawing room had a large display screen. When I had entered the room, it was displaying famous landscape paintings. If I'm not wrong, it was a Renoir. I don't remember the name of the artwork, but it depicted a boat upon a river.

I was taken on something called a “Virtual Date” using that display.

Using a handheld terminal, you could choose the routes, and could select the conversation and actions from an available list, and displayed imagery to make it seem like you were actually walking through the city, apparently it was such a service.

I felt like preparing in advance for your date with something like this would only make the real experience boring, but it seemed to be popular among females.

Well, since it displayed all the tourist spots in CG that was close to the original, you wouldn't run into a situation where you felt “It's different from what I expected”. However, it's not necessary to make decisions when I just want to do a preliminary check of the area. I'm just accompanying my sister on her sightseeing trip, and not actually going on a date. I wasn't looking for advice on how to go on a date.

Even so, I had many of my decisions rejected.

No matter how I look at it, she was playing around with me. Looking back, Mayumi-san had written “I was bored, so I'm glad you contacted me” in her mail. No doubt, she was using me to alleviate her boredom.

Mayumi-san's sisters joined in at some point, and the number of rejections I had to endure increased.

I thought I would lose heart. No, in fact, I might have lost it three or four times.

However, thanks to that, I was able to decide on a route to guide Akane.

After giving my thanks, I left the Saegusa mansion, but I was mentally in pieces.

For some reason I felt like letting loose once in a while.

However, Mayumi-san's younger sisters; were they called Kasumi-chan and Izumi-chan? What was with the appraising look they gave me?

February 23rd, 2097 (Saturday)

Today, I received a pleasant surprise.

It was not just Akane who came to Tokyo. George came to stay over as well.

Although it has been less than two weeks, I felt like it had been a long time since I saw him.

Akane was pretty angry with us who were celebrating our reunion, but friendship is more important than sibling relationships, dumb sister.

Akane was saying meaningless things like “impure” and “pervert”, but I ignored her.

If it was just Akane, I intended to take her to an appropriate restaurant and prevaricate (ignore her), but I can't treat my best friend who came all this way in such a rough manner.

I took George, and while we were at it, Akane as well, to a well-established sukiyaki restaurant that said it was established in the year 1869.

The food was as good as expected. George was happy. Akane was the only person who was complaining saying that, “I wanted to eat something prepared by hand”, but don't you usually eat stuff at home that is made by the automatic cooking machine?

Even after we returned to this house, there was a mountain of things we needed to talk about.

I can't write all of that here, and nor do I have the time to do so.

February 24th, 2097 (Sunday)

Since it was an order from my father, I intended to show Akane around using the route that Mayumi-san helped me pick.

However, that plan was cancelled due to Akane herself.

That sister of mine said “Today, we're definitely having hand-made food” and shut herself in the kitchen since morning while being strangely enthusiastic.

From morning, you know? Since we couldn't use the kitchen, our breakfast today was just buttered toast.

Akane's hand-made cooking was finally completed just before noon.

Thankfully, I wasn't used as a gofer to fetch ingredients as the overseer of this house kept it stocked with items such as spices.

It tasted okay. It wasn't bad, but I didn't think it was good either.

I mean, what Akane made was curry rice. What's more, she used a commercial roux.

Saying that it will taste like a pro's cooking with a little tweaking only applies to people who can actually cook.

There is a saying that anything can be eaten if you put curry powder on top, but the taste of the curry was so strong that it overwhelmed any other subtle flavors.

George said it was 'delicious', maybe out of politeness to my sister. She seemed happy with that, so I guess it's okay.

Akane's cooking took up pretty much all morning, so I had to cut down on the places that we would visit. The plan that I constructed after going through the trial of being toyed around by the Saegusa sisters went to waste.

After thinking about it for a while, I decided that we would just go around the places in order, and go back to the station when we ran out of time.

When I asked Akane and George to pack up their luggage, that foolish sister of mine asked me "why?" in a dissatisfied voice. Of course, that's because I'll be sending the luggage over separately after the two of you go back. In fact, I was the one who wanted to ask why she asked such a question.

However, Akane didn't intend to go sightseeing in the first place. She said, "If I'm going to have fun, then I'll do it with my friends over summer break or spring break." Apparently, the reason she came over this time was to see the house and confirm whether it was suitable for inviting her friends over.

Dad.

Thanks to your misunderstanding, I was treated like a toy at the Saegusa mansion.

While I was quietly boiling in anger, Akane said that there was someone she

wanted to meet.

If that's the case, tell me earlier. The other party might have plans of their own, after all.

I was only able to maintain such a state of composure until I heard the name of the person that Akane wanted to meet.

The person Akane wanted to meet was Shiba-san.

I rejected that idea many times. I told her to give up because it was impossible.

However, I was not able to convince Akane. She scolded me saying that I should at least try to call her. My sister started to insult me saying that I couldn't even make a phone call because I was a loser.

Fine, then. If you must insist, I'll make the phone call.

I replied that way only because I was caught up in the heat of the moment and responded to her provocation.

With my means of retreat cut off, I made a phone call to Shiba-san while Akane and George were watching.

The person who answered the phone was a young girl dressed in a maid outfit.

I felt like I had seen her before. If I remember correctly, she was a first-year student on the Student Council at First High. Don't tell me, did I dial the wrong number?

While I was flustered, she replied saying, "Yes, this is the Shiba residence."

I was relieved that I hadn't made a mistake, and introduced myself saying "My name is Ichijou" while I was overtaken with a different sense of doubt.

Don't tell me, is that guy playing around with a junior and making her cosplay as a maid, even though he has Shiba-san?

Thinking about it calmly, there was something wrong with me back then. Anyone observing that scene would think that the person who even thought of such an idea was the one who had dangerous interests.

Shiba-san is the next head of the Yotsuba Family. It's not strange for her to have a maid at home. It's more appropriate to think that this is her real occupation, and she was not cosplaying.

When I said that I wanted to talk to that person, the maid girl transferred the call without even asking me for a reason.

Her voice came from the speakers saying, "This is Shiba. Ichijou-san, it's been five days since we last met, hasn't it?"

I was uncharacteristically drunk on the sense of joyfulness. That person remembers the day when she last met me!

It was unfortunate that the display was blacked out, but that's not unusual when speaking from a personal residence. Women especially tend to have a dislike being seen in their loungewear by people of the other sex.

Despite that, just her voice alone was charming enough. I did my best to avoid having my mind taken away by it.

When I told her that my sister who had arrived in Tokyo wanted to see her, and asked if she could spare some time while apologizing for the short notice, that person cheerfully agreed. That guy also being present was a condition, but I thought that it couldn't be helped. Even despite our special circumstances, I would find it strange if a young woman agreed to meet a man alone after being called out by him.

We decided to meet at a cafe near First High, instead of either of our residences. It was a shop called Einebrise. Considering the speed of modern public transportation, it was possible to predict how long it would take to reach any place within Tokyo with a negligible margin of error.

That person, who I had met for the first time in five days, seemed to be shining. I felt that only the atmosphere around her was different. Even Akane was struck dumb and was bedazzled by her. She was almost incoherent when she introduced herself, but I didn't feel like laughing at her. The charms of that person go beyond the boundaries of gender.

George started talking to Shiba in a lively manner. Maybe it was my imagination, but I felt like that guy enjoyed talking to George as well.

They were talking about complicated stuff like “similar phenomena from different systems” and “modularization of the activation sequence”, but since George seems happy, that’s okay.

Also, I was able to talk to that person because George kept that guy busy.

We parted ways with her after about an hour, and after showing them around the Shibuya-Harajuku area a bit, we temporarily returned to the secondary residence. I told them that I would send the luggage separately, but they wanted to carry it along with them.

They also said that I didn’t need to see them off, so I left Akane to George and parted from them at the doorway of the house.

That was when I heard Akane’s impression of the meeting, but her reaction was a little strange.

She said that it was a bit scary. When I asked her if she was talking about Shiba-san, she shook her head. It appears that she was talking about that guy.

As far as I saw, he behaved as a proper gentleman towards Akane. Sure, his appearance may give an air of uneasiness, but there are plenty of people with much scarier faces back at home. Shiba’s face shouldn’t have been stern enough for Akane to feel scared.

I asked her what she felt was scary.

Akane shook her head while saying she didn’t know. She didn’t know, but it was scary.

Akane went back home after saying “Nii-san, be careful”.

February 25th, 2097 (Monday)

School resumed from today.

The activities of the anti-magic faction had gradually increased in intensity. Even though the person who had incited it, the terrorist, was dead, that fact was meaningless to the people who were making a fuss.

During the period when the school was closed, small riots broke out all over

the country.

However, my classmates whom I met after a long time were no longer as uneasy as they were before the school was temporarily closed.

They probably got used to it. When a state of alert persists, people will get used to it. The situation is still dangerous, it's just that their sense of alertness has gone down, but if they were to stay on their toes all the time their minds would not last. Perhaps numbing oneself to fear is unavoidable for the mind to protect itself.

In any case, Class 2A was once again lively like it had been before.

In my case, I no longer had to leave school early because my mission had ended. It's unhealthy to stay alone at home anyways. Since I was going to be staying here for a while yet, I had to think of a way to use my time after school.

For today, I asked to observe the activities of the Public Morals Committee. I'm also on the Public Morals Committee in Third High, after all. I had wanted to observe them once before going back to Kanazawa.

When I asked for permission to observe while we were having lunch in the afternoon, the Committee Head Yoshida immediately agreed.

After Yoshida, Kitayama-san asked, "Do you want to go on the rounds with me, then?"

I remembered Morisaki's words from the day I had transferred in.

The people to watch out for amongst the second-year girls.

The first name on that list was "The actual Head of the Public Morals Committee" Kitayama Shizuku.

Kitayama-san looks like a quiet and obedient girl. She occasionally makes retorts that dig into your vitals, but she doesn't seem to be the kind of person who would hurt others.

I felt curious about just what part of her made Morisaki and the others be so vigilant of her. At the same time, the alarm bells of my instincts were going off in my head.

Maybe he sensed my indecision, Yoshida told Kitayama-san that he would

take over showing me around, and suggested that they switch shifts for today.

Kitayama-san readily agreed. Maybe her intention was to get Yoshida to say that all along? I'm probably just overthinking it, but if that is indeed the case, then her nickname of "actual head of the Public Morals Committee" makes sense.

It was then that I noticed that there was one person missing from the group of people who usually have lunch together.

I casually asked if Chiba-san was on leave today.

I could tell that the six people at the table except for Shiba immediately turned somber.

While I was worried that I asked something inappropriate, Shiba gave me a short explanation saying, "She's not attending school today because of the Shonanoka (post-funeral) ceremony."

I had thoughtlessly forgotten that the eldest son of the Chiba Family had died in the line of duty during the search for the terrorist.

After school, Yoshida showed me around the duties of the First High Public Morals Committee. The first thing that surprised me was that the logs of the activities were properly maintained. When I asked about it, I was told that the head of the Committee, Yoshida, was maintaining the records himself. I was also told that Yoshida also took notes during meetings. Apparently, Yoshida is good at speed writing.

When I asked him if he used shorthand, he gave me a demonstration on the spot. He started writing characters on a large notebook with a brush pen at a fast pace. I couldn't read it, but I somehow understood that it was cursive script.

I was really shocked to see someone who practices calligraphy in this day and age. I was so surprised that I couldn't control myself. I asked him why he had such a skill.

With a slightly distressed expression, Yoshida replied that it was necessary for

making talismans. Come to think of it, this guy was a practitioner of ancient magic. So he still uses magic that utilizes talismans? I remember that he used a strange-shaped CAD during the Nine Schools Competition.

My wish to see Yoshida use magic in his original style was soon granted. A fight had broken out behind the small gymnasium.

It seems the students of First High are hot-blooded as well. There is a big difference between what you hear and see for yourself.

It seemed to be a usual occurrence. Yoshida's warning to halt was just a formality. He probably understood that these people wouldn't stop just from being told to.

Yoshida did not take out any talismans. Instead, he took out what appeared to be a folding fan from his left sleeve. Looking closely, it appeared to be a set of metal cards set in the appearance of a folding fan using a metallic frame.

Yoshida unfolded one of the cards of the fan-like item using his left hand, extended the index and middle fingers of his right hand together and touched that card.

I felt something move through the air. I felt a cool and pleasant mist brushed upon my cheeks, and suddenly, the students who were fighting were enveloped in a thick fog.

I heard screams saying it was cold from within the fog. Well, it's still February, so it's like the middle of winter after all.

But that was not the only reason. I think that fog also included a dense layer of Psions.

That would make it difficult to read any activation sequences. It was not as perfect an interference as cast jamming, but I thought that it would be difficult to cast any magic using a CAD unless you used a much larger quantity of Psions than usual.

Yoshida gave another warning. Along with a threat that he would use electricity on them next time.

The brawl immediately subsided.

It was a very interesting thing to observe.

Towards the end of the patrol, I asked Yoshida why there were some boys who called him by his first name and some who called him by his last name.

It was something that I had been curious about, but Yoshida explained it to me politely.

Since it's a matter of Yoshida's privacy, I won't write it down here.

I was just surprised to see that he had a side to him that cared for his friends.

February 26th, 2097 (Tuesday)

Today after school, the student council work was shown to me.

She and that guy worked together in the Student Council.

That gave me a somewhat complicated feeling.

In the Student Council Room, besides Mitsui-san from my class, a first-year student wearing a maid dress and Mayumi-san's little sister were present.

The name of the first-year student with the maid dress is Sakurai-san.

Mayumi-san's little sister is Izumi-chan.

Shiba-san is a given, but that guy takes his work seriously as well.

Actually, what the heck is up with his typing? It looked like he was only using the keyboard, but his fingers were moving so fast while typing that my eyes couldn't keep up. Don't tell me there's something like a "Typing speed increasing self-acceleration magic".

Apart from their usual clerical work, they were also preparing for the graduation ceremony and the after party. It should be the same at Third High. As that guy seemed to be taking care of the administrative work all by himself, Shiba-san, Mitsui-san, and Izumi-chan were discussing ideas related to the plan for the party.

Because I was asked by Shiba-san for my opinion, I shared my information about the progress and planning at Third High. I was good that I could be of service to her.

In the midst of the discussion, it felt like Izumi-chan was appraising me again.

Am I being too self-conscious?

But I am not being a narcissist.

It was getting gradually darker outside. Kasumi-chan, who is another little sister of Mayumi-san, appeared from the door inside the Student Council Room. I also thought of the time when I visited the Saegusa Family before. These two girls nevertheless are monozygotic twins. I couldn't be sure because they had different hairstyles and gave off different vibes, but I could easily tell that their faces were identical when they were wearing the same uniform.

Kasumi-chan also sometimes gazes at me appraisingly.

What on earth is that?

After that, we met with Yoshida, Saijou, Kitayama-san and Chiba-san.

We went to the coffee shop Einebrise where I had spent time with Shiba-san last Sunday. It seemed like they were regular customer at the shop.

I am lost whether to say my condolences to Chiba-san or not, which I couldn't do during lunch break.

In the end, I decided not to say anything. That was because Chiba-san was giving off an aura that said it was a touchy subject.

In our current situation, I thought that saying condolences would be difficult.

February 27th, 2097 (Wednesday)

My school transfer period will last until Saturday of next week. Only next Sunday is a holiday.

Is this okay?

The mission had ended. As for the cleanup mentioned by my old man, it felt like there was no longer any need for that. Normally it should have been fine to return to Kanazawa right away.

That made me wonder all the more if I would not regret ending it like this, having done nothing.

At today's lunch time, the topic amongst the girls was the question what they want to do for the holiday.

She responded with "Recently it has been exclusively shopping. However, we went to see a movie on occasion." There seems to have been an Onee-san who likes movies.

Now, on the left side of the monitor where I am writing my diary, the ticket site is displayed. The schedule of movies that would be screening or premiering next week was displayed as a list there.

Well, what should I do?

I've been asking myself that since a little while ago.

Is it okay not to do anything like this?

And will I not regret this?

I may never get this opportunity again.

That's right. I won't get anywhere if I just keep being indecisive.

If I'm rejected, I'll just give up.

I touched the monitor and pressed enter.

A message was displayed saying that the ticket was downloaded to my inbox.

It's a little late to be thinking this after having submitted an engagement request, although it was my father who actually did it. I can no longer turn back now.

I really don't want to risk everything on this, though.

February 28th, 2097 (Thursday)

The last class for today is over.

As usual that guy came to pick up Shiba-san.

I called out to that person to stop her as she started to go towards the Student Council Room.

There were many students in the corridor.

Next to her, that guy was there.

However I chose to not try and be alone with her on purpose. I felt like I would lose if I hid from him and did things in secret.

I displayed the ticket on my mobile terminal and invited her to go see a movie with me this Sunday.

Her eyes were wide open. She looked up at Shiba's face with a slightly troubled expression.

Shiba-san asked me "Is that an invitation to a date?" directly.

I stubbornly answered "Indeed".

That guy's response was "I can't let her go alone".

He had made his position known.

But the next line was surprising.

That guy gave his permission as long as I don't mind taking Sakurai-san to the movie as well.

Nevertheless, I certainly don't mind. So I hurriedly invited Shiba-san once more.

After showing a little embarrassment, she smiled brightly and nodded.

With a beaming smile, she accepted the proposal for a date!

To tell the truth, I expected that that guy would not stop Shiba-san. That guy has a side to him that does not want to restrain Shiba-san.

But I knew that I'd never be alone with Shiba-san. There is no guy who'd let his fiancée be alone together with a bastard who has his eyes set on her.

What was surprising, was that he didn't say that he wanted to come along as well.

That guy chose Sakurai-san as her companion.

Of course, I definitely prefer this arrangement. Although I would not be able to be alone together with her, it's far better than having an annoying male accompanying us like a third wheel.

Is he trying to show off that he has nothing to worry about?

Can you afford that?

If that's how he wants to be, then I'll steal her away from him without holding back.

Don't come crying to me later on!

March 1st, 2097 (Friday)

Today it was March. One month left until I become a third-year high school student.

Today's lunchtime topic became our future paths.

I'm planning to go to the National Magic University. Everyone else was hoping to be admitted to the National Magic University, too. I thought Saijou had plans to attend the National Defense Academy but it seems that he wants to be a member of the riot police.

Objectively speaking, unless I lost my magic power by accident I will not fail the exam for the National Magic University. That is even more certain for her than me.

If I become a university student, I can be at the same campus as she is for four years this time.

That could turn into a difficult time for me. The current situation is that she is the fiancée of another man.

But for now I'm looking forward to my campus life with her.

March 2nd, 2097 (Saturday)

Honestly speaking.

I did not get anything done since this morning.

Tomorrow is finally the day, you know?

To this day I had not realized that I was so inexperienced.

I never imagined that I'd be worried about what to wear tomorrow.

For now, I have the ticket. I arranged the purchase for Sakurai-san's already.

There are enough war funds.

I also set the GPS. Although I don't think it is necessary as I made sure to beat the map of the meeting place and the movie theatre into my head.

I set my alarm clock as well.

All preparations are done, everything is okay.

Alright, let's sleep.

I'll become even more anxious if I stay awake.

March 3rd, 2097 (Sunday)

I would never make a cliched mistake like being late for the appointment because I overslept.

My head was sharp and clear after having a good night's rest. Am I actually more resilient than I thought?

I washed myself thoroughly in the bath. I shaved my beard while I checked myself 10 times in the mirror. I dried my hair diligently with a hair dryer. I put on the clothes I had selected after agonizingly trying on different clothes for 3 hours yesterday. After all that I left for the meeting place.

I wasn't this anxious even during the Yokohama incident.

I arrived 40 minutes before the appointed time at the meeting place.

Well, that's only natural.

The waiting time was not as painful. As I imagined her in various casual clothes, the appointed time came before you could say movie date.

She appeared three minutes before the appointed time.

The instant I laid my eyes on her, the world changed.

Through my eyes, it was undoubtedly changed.

The scenery became gorgeously colored.

She was the center of the world.

I even forgot to breathe while I was staring at her.

The hem of an elegant gray skirt was peeking out under the hem of a beige long coat.

Her legs were wrapped in thick tights and the heels of her pumps made rhythmic sounds.

The color of her cashmere muffler and her coat was matching her beige gloves. In her overall mature fashion coordination, her fluffy earmuffs became a cute accent.

She came before me who was standing in place and asked: “Did I keep you waiting long?”

I shook my head so vigorously, just short of tearing it off entirely.

She leaked out a slight chuckle.

I thought I was being childish.

But I don’t regret it. Because it made her laugh.

For the sake of her smile I will do anything, even act like a clown.

After my nervousness subsided, I noticed Sakurai-san standing diagonally behind her.

Sakurai-san was wearing a short coat, a turtleneck sweater, slim fit jeans, high cut sneakers, fake leather gloves and a knit hat. Her fashion coordination was a bit tomboyish, in contrast to Shiba-san.

It looked like a battle-oriented style to me. Or is that just my imagination?

Because it was precisely the right time, we headed to the cinema without any further delay.

There is no need to be in a hurry because we have reserved seats.

After we bought only drinks we entered the screening space.

But naturally, the inside was heated. Sakurai-san and I just opened the front

of our coats while Shiba-san took off her coat gracefully.

Below the coat was an elegant gray one-piece.

I stopped breathing. How many times did that happen today. I fixed my eyes on her. She smiled at me with a troubled expression while sitting down elegantly.

The seat order was me, then Shiba-san, then Sakurai-san.

In the cinemas 100 years ago, it was so narrow that the shoulders of people sitting next to each other would touch. Lovers would hold hands on the armrest while watching the movie. I'm not sure if this is the truth, or a lie, but that was supposedly a common occurrence.

But in the cinemas these days it didn't happen that the bodies of people next to each other would touch.

The enveloping bucket seat conveys vibrations and inclination as an important feature. Naturally one can turn off this feature by choice, but that does not change the fact that the seat surrounds the entire body.

Therefore it won't happen that Shiba-san's and my shoulder or our fingertips touch by accident. I envied the people from back then.

The movie I picked advertised itself as a typical love story. I had no interest in movies at all, so I chose the currently best-selling title in the love story category for safety.

The distributor is a famous Hollywood studio. The setting was the New York of the 1990s. In this era the existence of super powers, let alone magic, was not public. A girl who was hiding her powerful psychokinesis all her life meets an ordinary boy and falls in love with him. That's about the rough outline of the story.

The lights were turned off in the hall. The 180-degree half-cylindrical shaped screen was lit. The audience is supposed to watch the front screen while within 30 degrees left and right only auxiliary images were reflected to deepen the feeling of immersion. I was impressed since this was my first time watching a movie in a long time and said "Ahhhh!".

Before watching it, I expected that it would be an ordinary setting with no plot twists, but it certainly lived up to its reputation as a worldwide hit. It does not rely on flashy special effects. A girl who suffers from her secret and a pinch of forbidden love. The boy is frustrated that the girl will not show her feelings easily. Each emotion was drawn carefully with deep 3D images. Despite the tragic ending, I felt refreshed after watching it.

Shiba-san also seemed to be satisfied. Because this was the most important thing for me, I felt relieved that she said “That was interesting” and laughed.

It went well so far.

But at the exit of the cinema, that guy was there.

That guy wasn't alone. In addition to the usual faces of the lunch group Mayumi-san's little twin sisters were waiting for us.

Shiba-san mutters “Onii-sama” with a surprised expression. She still seems to have the unconscious habit of calling that guy “Onii-sama”.

Perhaps because she calls Shiba “Onii-sama” internally I thought that I still had a chance. However at that time I didn't have the presence of mind to think of such things.

Despite Shiba-san standing beside me I yelled at them spontaneously “You guys, what are you doing!”. Their reactions were not likeable at all, only Mitsui-san and Shibata-san looked frightened while the rest was composed. Chiba-san was smirking extremely pleased.

That guy shamelessly gave me a reply “I came to pick up Miyuki”! That guy seems to have given his permission only for watching the movie.

Are you kidding me! Of course I had invited her with “Would you like to go watch a movie?” but what followed in such situations after the movie was finished wasn't “thanks” and “goodbye”! Afterwards there would be various options like drinking tea or walking around in the streets!

From there we decided to spend the time together with everyone. After seeing the apologetic smile she directed at me, it was impossible for me to object.

Even with such a smile, she was dazzling.



To be honest, it was kind of fun, you know? But this wasn't what I wanted, was it?

That guy is not the only one with a bad personality. Everyone including the girls around that guy have personalities too.

I was convinced of that today.

March 9th, 2097 (Saturday)

Today my time at First High had come to an end.

Even if I read back the diary of this week, from Monday to Friday there is nothing of great importance written down.

The feeling of fatigue from Sunday continued throughout the week.

I am ashamed even if I do say so myself.

Today the lunchtime group members will give me a little farewell party.

I was told to go home first and change my clothes, so I did as instructed and changed to casual clothes. The place they took me to was an establishment for a retro game called bowling.

I tried bowling for the first time in my life, under the rule that magic was absolutely forbidden, which was obvious even without being said.

Because it was my first time my results were awful. It saved me that I wasn't the only one.

Shiba-san's rough clothing today was a long knitwear sweater and woolen tights. She often had gutter balls (when the ball goes off the bowling and into the trench) and let out an embarrassed laughter every time. That appearance was insanely cute. It was hard to suppress my impulse to secretly taking a picture of it.

Chiba-san seemed to be experienced and she had the leading score amongst the girls.

And that guy, I never hated him more.

Even though he said it was his second time, what's up with that high score! It's my farewell party so why can't you hold back a little is what I wanted to say.

He set such a high score all by himself that not only Saijou and Chiba-san, even Yoshida and Kitayama-san seemed to be weirded out by him, so I wanted to say, "Serves you right!"

After that I was taken to another retro game called karaoke.

Shiba-san's singing voice was wonderful.

That guy is worse in singing than I was. I was a little relieved because of that.

March 10th, 2097 (Sunday)

Today, I decided to return home after making a stop at the Kanto branch of the Magic Association.

However I hadn't told anyone of that plan.

Still, she was waiting at the closest station to the Magic Association.

Because I found it surprising, the first thing I was asked was a mumbled "Are you alone?".

Shiba-san laughed for a moment and turned her eyes towards her rear.

Following that gaze at a little distance away was that guy, leaning against a pillar.

Geez! Just posing there!

But if he is sending me a lifeline, I'll use it. Is what I thought.

After exchanging some casual chatter I brought out my courage and squeezed out some words.

I told her that I was happy to be in the same class for this month.

She widened her eyes. Then a beautiful smile stretched across her face.

This might've been her reply.

"I also enjoyed it. If there is another opportunity I will keep you company again."

I do not mind if that's just lip service.

At that time, I didn't care about what the relationship between her and me was, or what the relationship between her and that guy was.

I vowed in my heart that I will absolutely attend the same college and the same campus as her.

[This will be continued on another occasion.]

Afterword

The “Master Clans Conference Arc” is complete with this volume. Have you enjoyed it?

Following Zhou Gongjin from the “Ancient City Insurrection Arc”, this time Gu Jie was let go and therefore the enemies will be renewed in the following chapters. I think some people are already guessing who the next enemy will be, but you have to read to see what will actually be there...

Just to mention a little teaser-like thing: A character that was a friend so far will stand as an enemy and a large scale magical war will break out with an important person that only appeared by name so far. Please look forward to it.

Oh, there is no chance of a development in which Miyuki becomes Tatsuya’s enemy, so don’t worry about that.

The protagonist this time was different than usual, as head editor-sama pointed out and I somewhat think that myself as well. I don’t think the main character was out of focus too much though... how did all of you feel?

Speaking of out of focus characters, there was also a suggestion asking if Ichijou Masaki is developing ok. I personally think that it’s nice to see him act as a teenager.

To tell the truth, as embarrassing as it is to say, I am writing this time’s story without knowing the thing called “the internal organ theory of the heart”. The phrase “the internal organ theory of the heart” comes up in a Google keyword search, but I don’t know if a hypothesis with this name really exists. I have seen stories on TV that said character and hobby taste were changed by organ transplantation, but since the information from the internal organs is transmitted to the brain, I think the brain might be sufficiently influenced by the replacement of an organ... Even if it’s taking measures after it’s too late, I think

I'd like to read publications related to that.

By the way, as a personal wish, I think that the spirit wants to exist as a soul, not some electrical signal created inside the brain.

Together with the publication of Volume 19, I am finally able to reveal a new media experience. As an author a movie seems like a really big deal, but it will receive a special story and I will make it the most interesting I can with everyone from the staff in the company. Please look forward to this. The content will be an original episode.

The next volume will become a collection of short stories. I have published the episode concerning the 2096 Nine Schools Competition serially in the Dengeki Bunko magazine and a newly written short story is planned to be recorded. It is not decided yet if this will be "Volume 20". Maybe it will have a name such as "Volume 13.5" or "Side B"?

Thank you very much for following me this time as well. In the next chapters Tatsuya and the others will also continue on to the last school year. "Mahouka Koukou no Rettousei" is finally rushing to its climax.

Please look forward to the short story collection of the next volume and the new chapters of "Prologue of Disturbance Arc" (provisional) as well, thank you very much.

(Satou Tsutomu)

